

Ringside View

Fellowship Articles on Covid and Gender



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Celebrate Her Life
An Initiative by Population First

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New Delhi

FOREWORD

'Ringside View' is a compilation of articles published by our *Laadli* Media Fellows in the year 2021. Once again we have identified 15 journalists from across the country in nine languages to write stories on COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on gender issues, along with a few more topics like the participation of women in panchayat elections, girl child, disability and adolescent sexual, reproductive health etc. The fellowships were instituted to provide the journalist with the much-needed resources to pursue stories that require deeper investigation, research and time. This was particularly helpful to the media persons during the pandemic when they were working against many odds.

The fellows have written some amazing stories highlighting issues that would not have got covered if they did not have the resources and the support of their editorial teams. The credit for these articles, therefore, also goes to the editorial teams of the publications publishing the articles. I would like to thank all the editors for publishing the fellowship articles and helping the stories reach a large number of readers.

The fellowships were instituted as part of the collaboration between Population First and UNFPA and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in India for engaging with the media to write gender-sensitive reports. Our deep gratitude to both for their consistent support.

I thank Aritra Bhattacharya, Avula Yamuna, Bhartesh Singh Thakur, Haroon Reshi, Inderpreet Singh, Indumathy.G, Jahida Parbin, Jyoti Yadav, Madhav Sharma, Shafeeq Thamarassery, Poorvi Gupta, Priyanka Tupe, Puja Singh, Shahina KK and Vijay 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, Hemlatha, from the US consulate and Sameera Khan for conducting the orientation programmes for the fellows.

My sincere thanks to the Chrysalis team for putting the book together and designing it.

Last but not least I thank my colleagues Mrinmayee Ranade, Malati Kembhavi and Pooja Nagdev for coordinating the project.

I hope all our Fellows will continue to write stories through a gender lens in future as well and provide us the ringside view of the ground realities. We are sure together we can make the world a better place for everyone.

Dr. A.L. Sharada

Director, Population First.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	Laadli Media Fellows 2021	4
Chapter 3	Articles	7

01 WOMEN AND COVID-19 RESPONSE

1.	PTSD, Depression, Fear Grip Haryana Asha Workers Amid Mounting Work Pressure And Hostility – Poorvi Gupta	19
2.	ASHA Karmisakal Samaj Paribartanar Bahok (ASHA Workers – Bearers Of Social Change) – Jahida Parbin	20
3.	With No Routine Check-Ups Or ASHA Workers, UP’s Chitrakoot Sees Rise In Home Births During Covid – Jyoti Yadav	23
4.	How Social Hierarchies Skew Our Recognition and Appreciation For Frontline Workers In Pandemic – Aritra Bhattacharya	25
5.	Lockdown to Bahi Thoka Nai Anganwadi Karmi (No Lockdown For Assam’s Anganwadi Workers) – Jahida Parbin	26
6.	What The Piling Bodies And Helplessness Are Doing To Our Overworked Health Workers – Shahina KK	29

02 COPING WITH THE PANDEMIC

1.	कोरोना : राज्य में अनाथ हुए 1131 बच्चे , सरकार कर रही देखभाल – Puja Singh	34
2.	Rajasthan’s Girls Fight For A Chance To Resume Their Education– Madhav Sharma	35
3.	Covid Has Made Many Kids In West Bengal Dropouts, But There’s No Official Data On That – Aritra Bhattacharya	38
4.	Atrocities On Women Rise In Rajasthan During The Covid Pandemic – Madhav Sharma	39
5.	Corona Kastalu Adavallake Akkuva (Corona Difficulties Are More For Women) – Avula Yamuna	41
6.	Women In Black: What One-And-Half Years Of No Work Mean For Female Bouncers In Delhi – Poorvi Gupta	44
7.	Coronavum Pengalin Velai Ilapum (Corona And Its Ripple Effect On Careers For Women) – Indumathy.G	47
8.	Aa Thozhilali Sthreekal Engineyinnu Jeevikkunnu? (How Do Those Women Workers Live Now?) – Shafeeq T	50
9.	Veettujoli Cheythirunna Aa Thozhilali Sthreekal Evide Poyi? (What Happened To Those Domestic Help Workers Who Used To Work At Your Homes?) – Shafeeq T	54
10.	Jeevan Panayam Vechu Joli Cheythittum Avaganana Mathram (Ignorance Is The Only Reward Even After Putting Life At Stake For Work) – Shafeeq T	58
11.	Grehokarmir Lockdown Poristhitir Chabi (Domestic Workers Struggle During The Lockdown) – Jahida Parbin	61

12. Unheard Life Of Single Women From Unorganised Sector – Priyanka Tupe	65
13. Single Women: Need For More Inclusive Policies On Social Security – Priyanka Tupe	68
14. Ontaraina Amma...Corona Tho Pillalaki Dooram (Mothers Isolated In Most Families Due To Corona Pandemic) – Avula Yamuna	71

03 HOLDING WOMEN BACK : CUSTOMS AND PRACTISES

1. Amidst Covid, Rajasthan Villagers Hunt 'Witches' – Madhav Sharma	75
2. Haryana Sees Spurt In Child Pregnancy Cases – Bhartesh Singh Thakur	77
3. Elopement Of Minor Girls On The Rise In Haryana – Bhartesh Singh Thakur	79
4. Sexual Abuse Cases In Marriages On The Rise In Haryana – Bhartesh Singh Thakur	80
5. Ghoonghat Continues To Limit Women's Autonomy In Haryana – Poorvi Gupta	83
6. Vaillo Bibah Ek Samajik Byadhi (Child Marriage – A Social Evil) – Jahida Parbin	86
7. Chinnari Pelli Kuthullu Akkuvaitunnaru (Child Brides Are On The Rise In The World) – Avula Yamuna	90
8. बाल विवाह : काल बनता कोरोना काल – Vijay Sharma	92
9. Sthreedhanakkola, 212 Maranangal, Prathikalaru? (Dowry Murders: 212 Deaths; Who Are The Culprits?) – Shafeeq T	94
10. Violence Against Women: A Reality That Goes Un-Or-Under-Reported, And Largely Unnoticed In Kashmir! – Haroon Reshi	100

04 WOMEN AND CHILDREN : RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS

1. माँ का दूध, बच्चों का रक्षा कवच – Puja Singh	104
2. पंजाब शिक्षा विभाग की सराहनीय पहल, बदलेंगे बेटों के बोल तो तंज-रंज से मुक्त होंगी बेटियाँ – Inderpreet Singh	106
3. Gender Gap: Haryana Women Fall Behind In Vaccination Drive – Bhartesh Singh Thakur	107
4. How The New Abortion Law Fails To Give Women Absolute Right Over Their Bodies – Shahina KK	108
5. How 'Pad Bank' Set Up By Allahabad University Students Is Helping Slum Residents Junk Rags – Jyoti Yadav	111
6. Thamizhagathil Athigarikum kuzhanthai Thirumanagal: Pen Kuzhathaigal Paathukapil Tamizhagam Pinokki Selkiratha? (Is Tamil Nadu Lagging Behind In Girl Child Protection?) – Indumathy.G	113
7. Adavallem Thakkuva (Women Can Run Home And Earn Money Also) – Avula Yamuna	118
8. Where 'Digital India' Is Out Of Range! – Priyanka Tupe	120
9. महिलाओं को आरक्षण नहीं, शिक्षा व सशक्तीकरण चाहिए, पंजाब के इन दो केसों ने किया साबित – Inderpreet Singh	124
10. In Search Of Freedom From Loitering To Uproot The Exploitation – Priyanka Tupe	126

05 STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY

1. महिला मुखिया ने बदली बड़ाम पंचायत की तस्वीर - Puja Singh 131
2. गांवों की सरकार में 60% महिलाएं, बदल रही तस्वीर - Puja Singh 133
3. सशक्त पंचायतों से होगा क्षेत्र का कायाकल्प - Vijay Sharma 134
4. Here's How Haryana's Youngest Female Sarpanch Spent Five Years In Power - Poorvi Gupta 136
5. कोविड-19 आभासी दुनिया के वास्तविक युवा योद्धा - Vijay Sharma 139
6. How Kerala Is Nurturing Young Volunteers For Crisis Situations - Shahina KK 141
7. Pandemic & Burden Of Caregiving: How Women Fought All Odds To Continue Taking Care of The Sick - Aritra Bhattacharya 144
8. Thousands Of Tribal Women Chart Their Own Future After Vocational training - Madhav Sharma 148
9. Education By Girls, For Girls' - How Ayodhya Group Is Helping Students Stay In School, College - Jyoti Yadav 150
10. Don't Want To Live Like A Victim - How A Women's Adalat In UP Is Empowering Survivors Of Abuse - Jyoti Yadav 153
11. पंजाब में निराश किसानों व मजदूरों के परिवारों के लिए आशा की 'किरण', यूँ लड़ रही है हक हकूक की लड़ाई - Inderpreet Singh 156

06 FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION - THE REAL TRUTH

1. डिजिटल डिवाइड : एक जमीनी हकीकत - Vijay Sharma 159
2. Why The Road To Adoption In India Is So Long And Winding - Shahina KK 161
3. 'Tamizhaga Arasiyalil Pengalukana Prathinithivam Enga?' (Where Is The Representation Of Women In Tamil Nadu Politics?) - Indumathy.G 164
4. 'Sex Workers In Asansol Sitting On A Ticking Time Bomb Of HIV/AIDS' - Aritra Bhattacharya 168
5. 'Valimaiyadayum LGBTQ+ Samugathin Kural' (Strengthening voices of LGBTQ+) - Indumathy.G 171

LINKS TO THE ARTICLES

175

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.

Laadli believes that every communication that goes in the public domain should be gender-sensitive to bring in a long lasting change. Sporadic efforts and communication would not be effective if the communication in the media and advertising, the biggest influencer, 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 former president of The Editors Guild of India , 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 2021

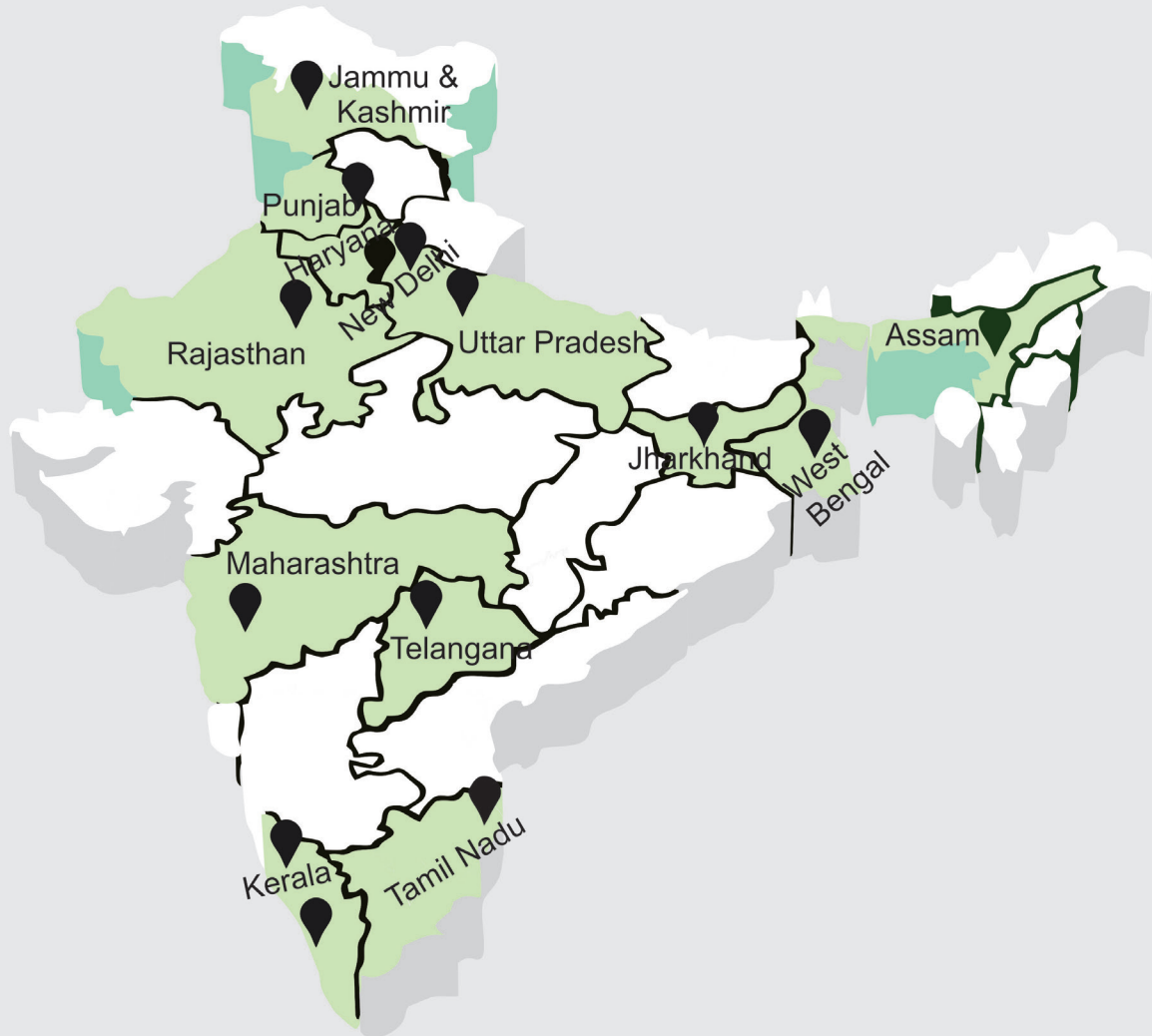
The *Laadli* Media Fellowships have over the years evolved to become a platform to equip all journalists to make their work more nuanced and sensitive while portraying gender issues. We realise that prejudices do not disappear by merely passing laws. It takes an argument, debate, training and practical commitment to confront discrimination wherever it happens. This year's fellowships provide and showcase inclusive journalism that cover a wide range of topics and is nuanced and widespread. It thereby helps people working in the media assess progress on gender equality, identify challenges, and contribute to local, regional, and global debates leading to the formulation of concrete policies to promote gender equality and the advancement of women, especially in India.

"COVID-19 is a crisis with a woman's face," said Secretary-General António Guterres in his opening remarks at the UN's sixty-fifth session. He said the fallout in the following months revealed how deeply gender inequality remains embedded in the world's political, social and economic systems. The inequity that persisted before the pandemic surfaced in India was alarming to begin with, and as the world moves towards recovery, the fear of what comes next looms large. UN reports predict that, post pandemic, women are 11 times less likely to return to their jobs.

The CEDA-CMIE Bulletin series has looked at changes in employment, consumer sentiment, household and individual incomes and expenditures in India using data provided by the CMIE and estimated that in the second wave, women lost 5.42 million jobs in April 2021 and 3.6 million in June 2021, while adding another 4.21 million in May and 3.55 million in July 2021.

The *Laadli* Media fellowship recognises the achievements of journalists and best practises of media organisations through our award program. It helps achieve an added argument and dynamism to a campaign that should be taken up and debated in every newsroom and covered by every media house. This year 15 *Laadli* Media Fellowships have been awarded. The articles span 13 States and are in 9 languages.

States represented by 15 fellows
awarded the *Laadli Media Fellowships 2021*



S.No.	Languages	Authors
1.	Hindi	Puja Singh Vijay Kumar Sharma Inderpreet Singh
2.	English	Madhav Sharma Bhartesh Singh Thakur Poorvi Gupta Shahina KK Aritra Bhattacharya Jyoti Yadav
3.	Punjabi	Inderpreet Singh
4.	Malayalam	Shafeeq T
5.	Urdu	Haroon Reshi
6.	Telugu	Avula Yamuna
7.	Tamil	Indumathy. G
8.	Marathi	Priyanka Tupe
9.	Assamese	Jahida Parbin

Laadli Fellows 2021

Puja Singh

पूजा सिंह, वर्तमान में प्रभात खबर रांची में वरीय संवाददाता के रूप में 2014 से कार्य कर रही हैं। इसके पूर्व हिंदुस्तान व सनमार्ग जैसे अखबारों में कार्य करने का अनुभव प्राप्त हुआ है। पत्रकारिता के क्षेत्र में लेखनी के लिए उन्हें इसीआरडब्ल्यू (IRW) एशिया मीडिया अवार्ड 2018 और लाइली मीडिया अवार्ड 2020 जैसे उत्कृष्ट सम्मान मिले हैं। लाइली ग्रुप के 2021 में फेलोशिप से जुड़ कर कार्य करने का अच्छा व बेहतर अनुभव भी रहा है।

फेलोशिप बुकलेट के लिए पूजा कुमारी की कहानियाँ समकालीन से लेकर सदियों पुरानी मान्यताओं तक के मुद्दों को उजागर करती हैं।



“ लाइली टीम का हिस्सा बनकर काफी कुछ सीखने व समझने का मौका मिला। महिलाओं के मुद्दे पर अक्सर खबर लिखा करते थे, लेकिन इस फेलोशिप के दौरान पंचायत स्तर पर काम करने का मौका मिला। महिला मुखिया ने कोरोना काल में काफी काम किये हैं, उनके काम को जाना और अपने अखबार में प्रकाशित भी किया। इस फेलोशिप पर काम करना अच्छा रहा, आप सभी का धन्यवाद। ”

Vijay Sharma

Vijay Sharma is a distinguished journalist who has always stood out for being high on facts and figures. His coverage is across print, radio, TV and other digital mediums. Presently, he is pursuing a doctorate as an alumnus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC). In addition to being a media educator, he produces a YouTube show called 'World View' focusing on international issues, incidents and developments. He was also recognized as 'Kalam Ke Sipahi' for his outstanding contribution to media and media education by the NewsPaper Association of India.

His stories cover a range of thematic areas, from highs and lows of the pandemic to ill- practices like child marriage prevalent in India.



“ Working as a fellow for the *Laadli* Media Fellowship, powered by Population First, was a remarkable opportunity. It was unlike any other project, as due to the pandemic there was only virtual contact with fellows and administrators. The Fellowship was an exceptional example of professionalism. It showed how realistic and purposeful stories are born and shaped by freedom, openness and cooperation rather than pressure! ”

Inderpreet Singh

Based out of Chandigarh, Inderpreet Singh is the Punjab Bureau Chief with Dainik Jagran. Previously, he was associated with Dainik Bhaskar as State Bureau Chief and Ajit Samachar as Sub Editor. He is a Post-Graduate in Journalism and Mass Communication and has been working in Hindi and Punjabi media since 1997.

His writings cover important stories from Punjab, focussing on farmers' plight, women and the girl child.



“ The experience of *Laadli* Media Fellowship was very good. We often keep doing stories related to women in the newspapers but that work is sometimes superficial. This fellowship opportunity is a rare opportunity as it helped in truly understanding the problem, uncovering it and seeking its solutions. I thank the organizers for this chance. ”

Madhav Sharma

Madhav Sharma is a freelance journalist who works for top dailies such as Rajasthan Patrika and Dainik Bhaskar. In addition, he writes for various websites like The Wire, Down to earth, Gaon connection and Mongabay (A French media organization), People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), Countercurrents etc. Madhav has reported on health, agriculture, gender, labour, environment, art, and developmental issues. Madhav has bagged multiple awards and fellowships such as the IIMCAA award, the Media recognition award by UNICEF and Lok Samvad Sansthan, Work No Child's Business (WNCB) award, *Laadli* Media Fellowship, SATB Fellowship and Media Rumble Fellowship. His stories cover the exceptional distress and issues women faced during the pandemic.



“ *Laadli* Fellowship has been a great learning experience for me as a journalist. While reporting for this Fellowship, I have understood that the impact of this epidemic has been maximum on children and women. Women have suffered the most, be it domestic violence or harassment at the workplace. Women have been severely impacted over and above the effects of the pandemic. Through this Fellowship, my humane and sensitive approach to the problems of women has grown. ”

Bhartesh Singh Thakur

Bhartesh Singh Thakur, a distinguished journalist, has been a Principal Correspondent with The Tribune for the last four years with coverage in Haryana. In addition, he has worked for Hindustan Times and the Indian Express at Chandigarh. He is a postgraduate in Mass communication and Physics and is currently pursuing his PhD. His journalism experience extends to court reporting, gender-specific issues, shamlat land compensation scams and scholarship scams. Bhartesh was awarded ICRW Asia Media Award in 2018 and NFI Fellowship in 2019 and was chosen for the *Laadli* fellowship in 2021.



Haryana has done well in 50 years of its existence, but the State is staggering behind on the social front. Bhartesh Singh Thakur highlights challenges associated with women and girls prevalent in Haryana.

“ Being newspaper journalists, we always keep looking for new ideas and new ways to attempt stories and this Fellowship helped in exploring new data sets and helped in crystallizing long-pending ideas. For example, I have in my Fellowship reported on spurt in teenage pregnancies in Haryana, elopement of minor girls, marital rape in Haryana and Women Helpline. After this Fellowship, I have become more conscious of women’s issues and will continue to break new grounds. ”

Poorvi Gupta

Poorvi Gupta is a Delhi-based reporter with a five-year record of delivering exclusives in gender. She is detail-oriented with an ability to engage in multiple roles in the newsroom. She has revealed, investigated, and reported several exclusive stories in crime & legal, politics, health, governance, environment, entrepreneurship, entertainment, and literature for gender beat. Some of her distinct works include a series of interviews with tribal women who broke the glass-ceiling and emerged as an inspiration called “TRIBAL PATHBREAKERS”.



Poorvi highlights issues faced by women living in modern India despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements. She focuses on the pursuit of women’s rights within Indian society.

“ This Fellowship has helped me push the bar in my reporting techniques and innately understand the grassroots gender-centric issues around the panchayat system in Haryana, gig economy, frontline works and how COVID-19 has devastated many lives and economy. On a personal level, my experience of visiting Haryana interiors independently and communicating with locals has built my confidence and motivated me to do more such stories not only from Haryana but from other states as well. *Laadli* Media Fellowship with its financial, motivational, and professional support has helped a young journalist like me to think beyond the humdrum of regular reporting. ”

Indumathy.G

Indumathy Gunasekar has been working as a journalist for over five years. She wants to be the voice of the voiceless people by empowering them. She predominantly covers local stories and trending news on women, children, social justice, climate change and the arts. Her opinions, writings, and research have appeared in numerous outlets.



“ Meeting the journalists who are the voice of voiceless people in *Laadli* Fellowship was the best experience. *Laadli* gave me an excellent opportunity to further enrich myself as a journalist. They approved the thought of writing articles about issues faced by women during this pandemic which gave me fulfilment as a journalist. *Laadli* has made me realize that there is still a long way to go as a journalist to further strengthen the voice of women who are an integral part of the development of the community. ”

Priyanka Tupe

Priyanka Tupe, a young journalist, identifies herself as a staunch feminist supporter. She is currently working in Storytel, an audiobook company, as a publishing consultant. As a freelancer, she writes stories for The Wire - Marathi, Divya Marathi and Dainik Pudhari.

Priyanka primarily focuses on single women and how the lockdown magnified their psychological and financial concerns.



“ Dr. Sharada’s conversation helped me gain better clarity and enrichment of the reports I have done so far under this Fellowship. Financially it supported well for four in-depth reports. As a result, I could write all my stories in a detailed, descriptive manner otherwise impossible. Also, I got to connect with some of the best journalists in the country, could read some of their stories, and it’s a critical exposure. ”

जाहिदा परबीन

जाहिदा परबीन ने 2004 में गुवाहाटी विश्वविद्यालय से स्नातकोत्तर की पढ़ाई पूरी की और 2012 में बी.एड डिग्री (बैचलर ऑफ एजुकेशन) पूरी की। उन्हें शिक्षण में दस साल का अनुभव है। वर्तमान में वह दैनिक गणाधिकार (असमिया) में कार्यरत हैं।

जाहिदा परबीन भारतीय समाज में बड़े पैमाने पर महिलाओं की स्थिति पर चर्चा करती है। वह महिलाओं के अधिकारों और हितों की रक्षा करने वाले भारत के संवैधानिक प्रावधानों और महिलाओं के समानता के अधिकार को सुनिश्चित करने और समाज में उनकी स्थिति को बढ़ाने के लिए उन्हें समान अवसर प्रदान करने के लिए सरकार द्वारा अपनाए गए अन्य उपायों पर भी प्रकाश डालती है।



“ मुझे लाइली मीडिया फेलोशिप के दौरान बहुत कुछ सीखने को मिलीं। फेलोशिप के दौरान मुझे समाज की अलग-अलग दिशाओं के बारे में बहुत कुछ सीखने का मौका मिला। लकडाउन के दौरान फेलोशिप के काम ने मुझे मानसिक तनाव को भी काफी हद तक दूर रखने में मदद की। कोरोनाकाल में असम की अलग-अलग जगहों में लोगों के परिस्थितियों के बारे में मुझे कुछ जानकारी मिली, और बाड़ के परिस्थितियों में बच्चे, बुजुर्ग और ख़ास कर के महिलाओं को असल में किन हालातों में से गुजरना पड़ता है। एक खुशहाल समाज को आगे बढ़ाने में महिलाओं का महत्वपूर्ण योगदान रहता है। ”

Shafeeq Thamarassery

Shafeeq Thamarassery, a multifaceted journalist and a fierce reporter who handles cameras, makes him one of the best New Media journalists who marked his milestones with various in-depth reporting. He identifies ecology and human rights as his main areas of interest.

Shafeeq's stories highlight the predicament of women in the organized sector and how they coped with it. In one of his articles, he also talks about the dowry system prevalent in Kerala.



“ This fellowship experience is extraordinary and valuable and has aided my career in journalism. It allowed me to interact with eminent journalists of the nation. I thank Population First for giving a platform for stories that otherwise get overlooked. ”

Haroon Reshi

Based out of Srinagar, Haroon Reshi is a distinguished journalist who majorly writes on the plight of Kashmiris. Currently, freelancing with Kashmir dailies like Kashmir Images and Daily Inquilab (both Urdu and Hindi). Before this, He worked as a Reporter and an Analyst for international, national, and local media organizations, including Voice of America, Asian Age, National Herald, The Sunday Indian, Loud India TV, Chauthi Duniya, Greater Kashmir Communication Pvt Ltd, Daily Aftab, Kashmir Images to name a few.



“ I feel honoured to have been part of the *Laadli* Media Fellowship. This opportunity was a game-changer and gave me a fresh perspective. My story on the transgender community allowed me to view this community differently and unravel facts that otherwise go unlooked. Further, I feel privileged to have worked under magnanimous people like Sharada Ma’am and Mrinmayee Ma’am. ”

Avula Yamuna

A media post-graduate, Avula Yamuna, based out of Hyderabad, Telangana, has been a journalist with Manam - a Telugu daily for over two years. She has recently joined the V6 Velugu newspaper as a Reporter and Sub-Editor.

Avila’s stories revolve around the pandemic induced issues faced by women. In addition to bearing the brunt of economic and social losses, women appear to be disproportionately negatively affected in physical health and wellbeing during the pandemic. Her articles describe how during any calamity, women are further marginalized.



“ I feel honoured to have been part of the *Laadli* Media Fellowship. The Fellowship arrived at the right time to give me the right kind of push. It has made me aware of how to present social issues impactfully. All thanks to Sharada ma’am and Mrinmayee ma’am for their guidance and support at each step. ”

Shahina KK

Shahina KK is a journalist and an Associate Editor with the digital news publication The Federal and a contributor for The Washington Post. She was conferred with the Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Women Mediapersons in 2011. She is also a participant in the Kiss of Love movement against moral policing in India. Based in Kerala, she is frequently cited by various mainstream media networks on gender equality and women's rights issues.

Shahina was associated with OPEN magazine between 2011–2020, was a former correspondent of Tehelka magazine and began her career as an Asianet News reporter.



She covers a range of issues in her stories, ranging from the plight of overworked health workers due to COVID 19, women issues, a wave of volunteerism in Kerala to the adoption process in India.

“ This Fellowship helped re-boost my confidence and gave me hope. Though I could finish the work well within the prescribed deadline, many of us struggled hard to cope with this most challenging time in our lives. We were struggling hard with the stress and strain induced by the pandemic and the travel restrictions altogether. However, Sharada Ma'am passionately extended deadlines and made everyone feel confident and relaxed. The result is each of us will be the ambassadors of Population First in future. ”

Aritra Bhattacharya

Aritra Bhattacharya is a journalist and researcher with bylines in Scroll, Wire, Caravan, Himal and other national and international publications. Discarding strict boundaries, his work over the last decade has spanned journalism, research, teaching, filmmaking and photography, often flowing into one another. His interests lie in politics, culture, conflict and media; and the various ways and places they intersect.

Aritra covers a gamut of issues induced by the pandemic. However, he emphasises the predicament of frontline workers, children and sex workers in Asansol.



“ Two reasons motivated me to apply for the *Laadli* Media Fellowship in 2021. First, it appeared when many news media outlets had stopped paying freelancers citing the pandemic, further reducing the space for serious stories looking at the differential impact of COVID-19 on women and other disadvantaged groups. Secondly, my bedridden father's situation additionally gave me insight into the critical role of women in caregiving roles in the pandemic and the relative levels of appreciation and awareness about this, including myself. The Fellowship also allowed me to travel to and report from different parts of West Bengal, bringing to light gender disparities in the context of COVID 19 and how this situation severely compromised the battle against other epidemics like HIV-AIDS etc. ”

Jyoti Yadav

Jyoti Yadav is a multimedia journalist working as a Senior Correspondent with The Print. She has extensively covered politics, gender issues and policy in rural India. Jyoti was one of the recipients of the National *Laadli* Media & Advertising Award for 2020. She is currently documenting the fallout of the second deadly Covid wave in rural India.

The main focus area of Jyoti's stories is women and children. In addition, she writes on education, sanitation and healthcare.



“ Firstly, I would like to thank Population First and Sharada Ma'am for the opportunity. Like many others, this was the first Fellowship that I have received. Since the beginning of my career, I have always focused on gender issues, but this Fellowship taught me different ways to explore gender stories. I travelled to UP to meet inspiring women. It was an enriching experience for me to write these stories on the ground and to know and connect to journalists across the country. It felt like a great community that provided solidarity and strength during the most challenging times of our lives. ”

CHAPTER 3

COVID-19 pandemic continued unabated in 2021, in fact it unleashed a devastating second wave which directly or indirectly affected nearly every family. Despite the prevalent difficulties, the fellows submitted 58 articles by 30th September and the remaining two were sent by end of October. The articles submitted were in nine languages viz, Hindi, English, Punjabi, Assamese, Malayalam, Telugu, Urdu, Marathi, and Tamil and came from across the nation.

A wide range of subjects were covered including:

- Impact of digital divide.
- Gender and intersectionality.
- Gender and disabilities.
- Women' s empowerment and Panchayats.
- Reproductive and sexual health and rights of women.
- Adolescent sexuality and young people's access to sexual and reproductive health.
- Impact of pandemic on livelihoods and resultant impact on unwantedness of girls.
- Increase in child marriage.
- Enhancing value of women and girls.

The estimated combined readership figures of all the publications where the articles were published was nearly 2,17,00,000. At an assumption of just 10% reach, the total estimated combined readership for these articles can be placed at 20 lakhs.

S.No	Thematic Areas	Number of Stories
1.	Women and Covid-19 response	6
2.	Coping with the pandemic	14
3.	Holding women back: customs and practises	10
4.	Women and children: rights and entitlements	9
5.	Strength in adversity	11
6.	From insights to action - the real truth	5

Type of Publication	Number of Stories
Print	29
Web	27

Author	Publication	Nature	Circulation rate
Puja Singh	Prabhat Khabar	Print	1,62,000 (print) daily circulation
Vijay Kumar Sharma	Dainik Tarun Mitra	Print	40,000 (print) daily circulation
Inderpreet Singh	Dainik Jagran	Print	2.7 lakh Hindi and 80,000 Punjabi daily circulation (print) and 1.66 lakh page views per day of the Hindi website.
Madhav Sharma	gaonconnection, 101reporters	Web	Gaon Connection Hindi - web - 65,000 page views per day, Gaon Connection English - Web - 33,000 page views per day 101reporters.com - 2.5M/year countercurrents.org- 2.5M/year
Bhartesh Singh Thakur	The Tribune	Print	3,00,000 (print) daily circulation
Poorvi Gupta	Yourstory.com/Herstory	Web	Yourstory's monthly page views:3,102,660
Shahina KK	thefederal.com	Web	daily traffic is 1.5 lakh per day
Aritra Bhattacharya	www.indiatimes.com	Web	indiatimes.com - 30 million per month Gaon connection English - Gaon connection Hindi - Gaon Connection: Over 18 lakh views a month
Jyoti Yadav	theprint.in	Web	56,000 page views per day
Shafeeq T	Dool news	Web	monthly traffic:15 Lakh
Haroon Reshi	Kashmir Images, Kashmir Uzma	Print	15,000 (print) daily circulation for Kashmir Images and 37,000 (print) daily circulation for Kashmir Uzma.
Avula Yamuna	V6 Velugu	Print	4 lakh (print) daily circulation
Indumathy. G	Hindu Tamil Thisai	Print	30,00,000 page views per day
Priyanka Tupe	thewire marathi	Web	20 thousand page views per day
Jahida Parbin	Dainik Gana Adhikar	Print	7000 copies (print) daily circulation

WOMEN AND COVID-19 RESPONSE

The pandemic exposed how unprepared the public health system was. During this time, in most cases, the first service providers available on the ground were community-based frontline women workers.

ASHAs were part of the 'Corona surveillance teams' that ensured migrant workers were quarantined when they moved back to their villages. Also, in cases where people could not home quarantine, they helped coordinate patients at quarantine centres. However, they were also at the receiving end of public wrath and anger as the representatives of the government. There are numerous stories of the way the communities had started viewing ASHAs with increasing suspicion and fear. The second wave further exacerbated the misconceptions and misinformation around the virus and its vaccines with community members chasing away the ASHA workers with sticks, and visibly sick community members refusing their help.

The ill-treatment of these frontline workers is described in New Delhi-based Poorvi Gupta's article. Poorvi's article, 'PTSD, Depression, Fear Grip Haryana ASHA Workers Amid Mounting Work Pressure And Hostility', featured in www.yourstory.com/herstory, highlights the conditions that have led ASHA workers to suffer from severe mental health issues, fatigue and breakdown. She notes that, Haryana's 22,000 ASHA workers have faced discrimination, loss of fundamental rights and access to mental health services. Stigma, fear, high risk and the extra burden of work, often without any protective equipment or remuneration for their labour, has led to this state.

'What The Piling Bodies And Helplessness Are Doing To Our Overworked Health Workers', by Kerala-based Shahina KK talks about a junior health worker committing suicide due to stress and fear. She interviews health and frontline workers to discuss their coping mechanisms to get through the trauma they encounter daily.

It is important to note that the struggles of ASHA workers are not confined to a particular region of India but have turned into a pan India phenomenon, as is described in Guwahati-based Jahida Parbin's article 'ASHA Karmisakal Samaj Paribartanar Bahok (ASHA workers - Bearers of Social Change)' featured in Dainik Gana Adhikar. She explains that not much has changed for ASHAs despite the important role they played during the pandemic. Jahida writes how the ASHA workers were the only activists who did not stop rendering their duties by playing a prominent role during the pandemic.

New Delhi-based Jyoti Yadav, in her article 'With No Routine Check-Ups Or Asha Workers, UP's Chitrakoot Sees A Rise In Home Births During Covid' writes about the increase of home births in Chitrakoot district in Madhya Pradesh due to the lack of funds and ASHA workers overstretched carrying on COVID related duties.

Whereas the larger debate has brought accolades for doctors and nurses, none is given to those responsible for delivering essential medical service at the ground level, the ASHA workers. This is apparent from a survey conducted by Oxfam in four states, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, that shows only 75 percent of ASHA workers had masks, and only 62 per cent were given gloves to perform their duties. The survey also reveals that nearly 29 per cent of the respondents were working more than 8 hours, and 42 per cent were working between 6-8 hours every day without any minimum wages or social security, often facing violence and discrimination.

Kolkata-based Aritra Bhattacharya, in his article, 'How Social Hierarchies Skew Our Recognition and Appreciation for Frontline Workers In Pandemic', writes how the ASHA workers, despite being the actual frontline workers, are lowest in the rung of hierarchy with only doctors and nurses lauded for their work. Despite the lockdown and curbs on

movement, the workers were performing their duties to the fullest, working tirelessly to prevent transmission while ensuring that the delivery of other health services remained uninterrupted.

Jahida Parbin, in the translated version of her article, 'Lockdownoto Bahi Thoka Nai Anganwadi Karmi (No Lockdown For Assam's Anganwadi Workers)', writes of the plight of Anganwadi workers in Assam, who are the functionaries of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in charge of managing the Anganwadi. As part of the frontline workers in the COVID -19 response, they have been severely overworked and underpaid, often denied fundamental rights. Jahida tells us the story of Kavita Sarkar, an Anganwadi worker from Assam and her responsibilities before and during the pandemic. As there was no school to take note of each child's education and health, they would make door-to-door visits focusing on weight checking, vaccination, nutritious diet, tracking anaemia etc. People, including family members, treated them as pariahs and kept a safe distance from them as they continued working in communities during the pandemic.

PTSD, Depression, Fear Grip Haryana ASHA Workers Amid Mounting Work Pressure And Hostility

Poorvi Gupta

3 September 2021, yourstory.com/herstory



As coronavirus started to rage in India last year, ASHA (accredited social health activist) workers were touted as COVID-19 warriors and frontline soldiers fighting the pandemic at the grassroots level. One year on, the gap in the supply of safety essentials such as masks, sanitisers and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, acute work pressure from the department, hostility from locals and work-life disbalance have left them in the middle of an unfolding mental health doom. Gap in the supply of safety essentials such as masks, sanitisers, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, acute work pressure from the department, hostility from locals and work-life disbalance have left them in the middle of an unfolding mental health doom. The former Ambala president of Haryana ASHA Worker Union was terminated this year after more than a decade of service.

Working under pressure in the pandemic

Bala has been accused of substandard work and 'bad behaviour'— an allegation she strongly rejects. She alleges that she's being targeted for being the force behind a series of statewide protests in Haryana since 2018. This isn't the first time she's at the receiving end of the stick for demanding basic rights for ASHA workers like safety gear and increased wages among other things. "I have been targeted for staging dharnas and speaking to the media against the fake claims of ministers and bureaucrats," adds Bala. She comes from an extremely deprived household where her husband is disabled, and one of her two sons had to quit his studies after she was fired while the other one lost his job.

Bala's story isn't an anomaly

Several among the 22,000 ASHA workers from Haryana have been dealing with similar cases of discrimination and maltreatment at the hands of the authorities regularly and the pandemic has only worsened it leaving a huge impact on their mental health. At a time when a section of our society can find some much-needed peace in their work-from-home regime during these devastating times, ASHA workers are denied even basic rights let alone any luxury.

ASHA Karmisakal Samaj Paribartanar Bahok (ASHA Workers – Bearers Of Social Change)

Jahida Parbin

11 May 2021, Dainik Gana Adhikaar

All the institutions throughout the country were closed last year (2020) as a nationwide lockdown was imposed due to COVID- 19. Thousands of people experienced a lot of untold hardships in every nook and corner of the country. Despite such an adverse situation, the hospitals were open for emergency cases. The northeastern state of India - Assam, faced a similar problem with the rest of the country. All the government and non-government institutions like schools, colleges, universities, banks etc., remained closed.

ASHA workers were the only activists who did not stop rendering their duties by playing a prominent role during those days. Their enthusiasm and persistence made the path easy for pregnant women. They took every necessary precaution while taking care of children and pregnant women.

They remained instrumental in checking their health condition and supplying them with suitable and necessary medical facilities. Besides children and women, the ASHA workers firmly stood for protecting the health of all classes of society. The ASHA workers did not look back during the lockdown and performed their services with complete dedication. They are the living example of those strong and fearless women who do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the children, pregnant women and all the village people.

The ASHA workers have been active in their respective fields during last year's lockdown period. They keep themselves in contact with the families residing within their jurisdiction. The ASHA workers were recruited as volunteers under National Health Mission (NHM). They bring about a connection of the women and children with the health care centre. One ASHA worker is recruited against 1000 population. As monthly remuneration, they are paid Rs.3000/ only. In addition to this meagre amount, the NHM provide them with some limited but necessary items like a bicycle, a bag, a set of uniform, etc. However, the government's responsibility does not end by providing a single bicycle to the ASHA workers as many of them cannot ride the vehicle. Moreover, they do not avail of any travelling allowance from the health department. So, the health department should have a provision to pay them their travel expenses.

The health department has bestowed upon them essential duties and responsibilities. The ASHA workers have been playing an imperative role in various fields. They do all health-related activities for all the mothers, children and villagers. They have to work to fulfil the goal of contraceptive campaigns and minimise mothers' death rate. In birth control, the ASHA workers have to face many difficulties because they have to convince females and males. They have to face more problems to convince the male in birth control measures. They do the duty of convincing the male and female together with great importance. Moreover, it is not easy to impart knowledge on family planning among families belonging to the same communities. The ASHA workers have to do hard work to convince and make people aware of these issues.

In addition to these, the ASHA workers work for the entire village to improve the sanitation system. Ayesha Siddiqia is serving in the post of Block Community Mobiliser under Bijoynagar Health Centre in the district of Kamrup. She informs that the ASHA workers do a lot of hard work for the welfare of society. They are very diligent and carry out their duties and responsibilities with utmost sincerity. Thus, one discovers the ASHA as an activist, a service provider, and a facilitator.

Moumita Bhatta Sharma, a Block Community Mobiliser under BPHC, Sonitpur, Assam, informs that the ASHA workers can be termed as the Head of the Health Department as they have been imposed with fundamental duties. An ASHA worker fully engages herself

in work for the welfare of the society, as a result of which various problems of pregnant women and children are lessening. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been at the forefront. Right from trying to make people understand the covid protocols to convince them to stay indoors. Even the villagers obey their suggestions and advice because of the familiarity. The ASHA workers have contributed a lot to prevent this pandemic.

We must appreciate the tremendous effort and hard work of the ASHA workers. The ASHA workers have become self-sufficient and have an identity of their own. Society has recognised them, and they have got the honour in the society for their hard labour.

Mamoni Das, an ASHA worker, hailing from the Nalbari district of Assam, informs that the villagers give her much honour whenever she works in the village. Without her knowledge, no villager takes any initiative in any health-related activity.

Mamata Talukdar, a 44 years old ASHA worker from the Kamrup district, informs that she has acquired so much experience working as an ASHA worker that she will find no difficulty in taking responsibility for moulding her future children. Therefore, she feels proud of working as an ASHA worker.

Based on her work experience as an ASHA, Juri Saikia Yadav, a 45-year-old ASHA worker of Tezpur, informs that she acquired a great deal of health-related knowledge and her mind is at peace by serving the society. She tells that the Election Commissioner and the distinguished persons attending a health-related meeting held at Tezpur call the ASHA workers the front fighters fighting against the COVID-19. In this way, they're greatly inspired and motivated. Although they are paid a meagre amount, they can't resign from their post. The praise and respect from the public give them energy and inspiration to go on with their work. At times, they think of giving up their job; but they cannot do so when the respect and love of the people come to their mind.

Awshini Gogoi, an ASHA worker, hailing from Sivasagar, feels a soldier on foot. ASHA workers have visited every household in society. Through a program called "Non-communicable Disease", they identify various diseases like _ blood pressure, sugar, T.B.etc and take proper steps to prevent them. Moreover, every three months they hold a program called "Maa". This program asks whether the mothers take adequate care of their children and keep their children in a neat and clean environment. Besides these, they give the mothers training in the vital matter of breastfeeding. She says she feels proud that she is an ASHA worker because the village women tell them things they cannot speak to their husbands. She also informs that she will be going ahead to do more and more work. But she expresses her discontent that she is paid a nominal remuneration despite doing a lot of hard work.

There is a long list of health-related activities assigned to the ASHA workers. Right after the birth of a baby, the ASHA worker takes the responsibility of protecting its health. They give the child different types of vaccines, immunization, determinization, etc. They take the newborn baby's weight every month and inquire whether it is sucking mother's milk, passing urine, developing any jaundice, etc. They also measure the temperature of the baby. They prepare a detailed report on all these matters and submit it to the hospital, and if necessary, they take the baby to the hospital.

Kheruda Rabha is an ASHA worker hailing from the Assam Meghalaya border area. She informs about her challenging work experience in the hilly area. It isn't easy to carry out health-related activities in these remote areas because of the unstable phone network. So they have to cover a long distance by climbing hills to collect information relating to the health condition of the hilly people. They have to travel 35-40 kilometres from their hilly area to reach the hospital. The ASHA workers have to carry out their duties and responsibilities with great difficulties in such remote areas.

Anupama Roy, an ASHA worker hailing from Dhubri, informs about her busy schedule during the lockdown period. Her main concern was to visit door to door to make people aware of the pandemic and save their lives from COVID -19.

Mahiron, another ASHA worker hailing from Dhubri, says that they always impart health service to the society, but during the lockdown last year, they had to work more on covid-19 than on their routine duties. They had to visit door to door after wading several kilometres in chest-deep water. They work, risking their lives. They had to reach the people by any means. They had to travel on a raft made of a banana tree. She informs that the strong water current often carried away the raft, and they were about to drown. During the critical juncture of covid-19, the ASHA workers performed those works that nobody dared to perform. They collect the report from each family and create awareness among people to make them cautious against Covid-19.

Sonali Das, another ASHA worker of this area, informs that they find more difficulties performing their duties at the time of flood because no arrangement from the side of the health department is made for the convenience of the ASHA workers.

Like any other time, during the lockdown, the ASHA workers visited door to door and created awareness among the pregnant women about nutritious food, vaccine, and doctors' check-up. The ASHA workers have been working on the issue of death rate. In addition, they create awareness among married women so that they do not hesitate to give birth to their babies in the hospital.

At present, the ASHA workers are increasing awareness for covid-19. Besides these, the ASHA workers performed their duties and responsibilities in the villages and cities during the last assembly election in Assam. They supplied masks, gloves, sanitisers, etc., to the voters in the polling station.

An ASHA worker does more than their scheduled duties. Yet, considering their workload, their monthly remuneration is so less that it looks pretty disgraceful. So government should pay proper heed to enhance their salary. The ASHA workers have been working with great enthusiasm in the health department. The eventful busy life story of the ASHA worker reflects the effectiveness of the NHM of the Indian government. In this way, the ASHA workers are playing a vital role to improve the health of women and children, and at the same time, they have been fighting heroically to prevent covid-19 and thus, they have emerged as the bearer of social change.

(Translated from Assamese to English)

With No Routine Check-Ups or ASHA Workers, UP's Chitrakoot Sees Rise In Home Births During Covid

Jyoti Yadav

9 August 2021, theprint.in

Chitrakoot: In the early hours of 9 July, 23-year-old Radha Devi started experiencing labour pain. Her family made a few frantic calls to an ASHA worker but she wasn't available.

Radha, who stays in Karvi block of Uttar Pradesh's Chitrakoot district, is one among 55 women in the district who could not access institutional delivery in July this year, district health department data shows. According to the health officials, of these 55 women, 23 did not even have access to a skilled attendant or any medical kit during labour and childbirth. This meant that either a relative or midwife operated on the women during childbirth. In the case of Radha, Soni Tripathi, the ASHA worker who was contacted by the family, said she was accompanying another pregnant woman that day to a community health centre for vaccination. "They called me. I had assured them that I would get free by 2pm but her (Radha's) labour pain was extreme. By the time I checked again, she had delivered a baby girl at home," Tripathi told ThePrint.

Drop in institutional deliveries

According to official figures from Chitrakoot district's health authorities, accessed by ThePrint, the district registered 1,179 institutional deliveries in May 2019, but the number dropped to 1,086 in May 2020. For the same month in 2021, the number reduced further to 1,016. The data for June shows a similar decline. In June 2019, there were 1,420 institutional deliveries, which dropped to 1,342 in 2020, and 1,232 in 2021. From April to June this year, when the second Covid wave was at its peak, Chitrakoot registered 196 home births. The figure stood at 955 for 2020 and 965 for 2019. District health officials cite the pandemic, lockdown and vaccination drive as the reasons behind the drop in institutional deliveries. "There was a complete lockdown. Our workforce was engaged with Covid management. The ambulance sometimes reached late. Also, even after labour pains have started, families wait till the last minute to approach an ASHA worker or Community health centres or district hospitals. This makes things difficult," District Programme Manager of Chitrakoot, Ram Kishore Karwariya told The Print. The drop in institutional deliveries has set alarm bells ringing among the district administration. During its review meeting held on 2 August, the district officials asked ASHA and Anganwadi workers to find out the reasons behind the drop and trace families that saw child births at home.

No routine check-ups or maternity benefits

Nearly two kilometres away from Radha's house, 32-year-old Savitri Devi gave birth to her fourth child on 10 July. Her husband, a migrant worker, Gore Lal, returned from Punjab in May. Holding the newborn in her arms, Savitri was surrounded by her three daughters when ThePrint visited her. Savitri said she couldn't get her name registered for availing maternity benefits at a government health facility either in Punjab or UP. "We did not know how to get her name registered in Punjab. Due to the lockdown, I lost my employment and had to return. There was no mechanism (to register her name) here either," Gore Lal said. Savitri's family tried calling the ambulance in the absence of a skilled attendant. But the ambulance never turned up and eventually, she decided against getting admitted into a hospital fearing she might have to pay the hospital bill. "All my daughters were born in a hospital in Punjab but we had to pay some amount there. This year we lost employment. So I refused to go to the hospital," said Savitri. Both Savitri and her husband worked as daily wage labourers in Punjab. Not having been monitored by an ASHA worker or an auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM), Savitri also missed on routine check-ups and iron and calcium tablets. Her newborn son was not given OPV-0, Hep-B and BCG injections within 24 hours of birth. Radha's daughter, too, wasn't administered these vaccines. Radha also missed her fourth routine checkup during her pregnancy because the ANMs were on vaccination duty, she said. Her MCP (Mother and child protection) card shows her check-up was done on 13

March, 10 April, and 5 May. According to the health ministry guidelines, four routine check-ups are mandatory.

Meanwhile, 23-year-old Suman, who lives in the same village and is in her ninth month of pregnancy, could go for mandatory check-ups only twice — 12 June and 10 July. Her expected due date is 17 September but she has not been counselled by the ASHA or ANM yet. “The Poshahar is irregular too. My check ups are delayed,” she told ThePrint.

Talking about the challenges faced by the health authorities, Karwariya, said, “Over the past few years, we have witnessed a rise in the institutional deliveries. Chitrakoot has 70% institutional deliveries. Yes, there has been a drop during the pandemic and the numbers are concerning. The routine check-ups were missed as our ASHA, ANM and anganwadi workforce was overburdened with the vaccination drive.”

Not a single female gynaecologist

Chitrakoot, an aspirational district with a population of around 9.91 lakh, does not have a single female gynaecologist. The only male gynaecologist at the district hospital is often overburdened. The district has 910 ASHA workers, 959 Anganwadi workers, and 134 ANMs. There is only one ANM available for every 5,000 women, and only one ASHA worker for every 1,000 women. The district saw 11 maternity deaths in 2019 and 18 in 2020. Till July this year, the district has registered five maternity deaths.

A district health official who did not wish to be named said, “It is our ASHA cadre which counsels and motivates a pregnant woman and brings her to the CHC or Sadar hospital. Institutional delivery is our priority but due to coronavirus, this workforce was engaged with Covid management.”

How Social Hierarchies Skew Our Recognition And Appreciation For Frontline Workers In Pandemic

Aritra Bhattacharya

20 July 2021, indiatimes.com

An Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) in Jalangi block in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, Sabina Yasmin visited at least 20 households every day in remote villages to deliver health and nutrition services at the door-step. She recorded births, deaths, pregnancies, nutrition levels; physically examined people for common ailments like flu, skin and water-borne diseases; provided medicines and nutritional supplements; and paid daily visits to homes of all pregnant women in her area tracking their progress and ensuring institutional delivery. But that was before the pandemic. Her monthly payment at the time, including fixed and variable components and funds provided by the Central and state government, ranged Rs 6000-6500. Most of the beneficiaries of her work comprised families of migrant workers, who began returning to their native villages in droves from other districts and states after the imposition of the nationwide lockdown on March 24, 2020.

"When migrant workers began returning to the villages, we had to visit an additional seven households of such workers every day, and keep a record of their movements," recalled Yasmin. "Plus, in every household we visited, we had to watch out for symptoms of COVID-19 infection. We had to physically examine suspects, record their temperature, counsel and link them up with testing and treatment facilities, monitor those in home isolation and trace people who came in close contact with infected patients," she said. Yasmin received no additional pay for the extra workload as a frontline worker in the pandemic. Worse, she was neither provided with any medical insurance, nor protective gear like mask and sanitizer despite the "touch-oriented" nature of her work and the high risk of infection. "The government gave us two cloth masks in 2019. It's already been over two years. But I guess they want us to use them for a few more years," she laughed. "Many of us got infected, including me," she continued. "I underwent pacemaker implantation when I was young and fell severely ill after getting infected, and was hospitalized for 16 days. The district medical officer ensured I got a bed in a designated COVID hospital because I am known widely as a leader and activist, but most of my colleagues were not so fortunate, and many died," said Yasmin, also Secretary of the Paschim Banga ASHA Swasthya Karmi Union.

Doctors, first among unequals

Yasmin's concerns resonated with those raised by other community level frontline women workers – including accredited social health activists under the National Health Mission, Anganwadi workers and their supervisors under the Integrated Child Development Services programme, and nurses working in government in private hospitals – and activists in West Bengal and Maharashtra. Officially, there are over 10 lakh ASHAs and 25 lakh Anganwadi workers and supervisors spread across the country who are serving as frontline workers through the pandemic. They are engaged in health and nutrition delivery, growth monitoring, and disease surveillance and detection, but Shubha Shamim, vice-president of All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers and Maharashtra State General Secretary of Anganwadi Karmachari Sanghatana, said their primary task was that of prevention – including through early detection of cases that can reduce chances of serious health complications among the infected. "Doctors and other medical staff, whose primary task is to cure the patient, come in much later," said Shamim.

Lockdown to Bahi Thoka Nai Anganwadi Karmi (No Lockdown For Assam's Anganwadi Workers)

Jahida Parbin

20 July 2021, Dainik Gana Adhikar

Kavita Sarkar is an Anganwadi Worker residing in the Nagarbera locality of Kamrup. Her eyes dream of a bright future for the children of the neighbourhood. Day in day out, she toils hard so that the lives of children may find some meaning. She, who handles both household chores and the Anganwadi centre simultaneously, opined about her work life that for the sake of the children of her society, she remains available 24 hours a day, even if it means sacrificing personal duties. Every morning, after finishing her domestic duties or leaving them aside, she arrives at the Anganwadi centre by 8 am. "When I wear the anganwadi uniform provided by the Government and go to the centres, I realise the true meaning of life."

As an Anganwadi worker, Kavita remains happy to keep her child close to her while teaching another ten children. In other jobs done by women, this facility is generally not available. Therefore, she remains delighted with this job and enjoys a sense of pride. Kavita states that from 8 in the morning to noon, she teaches children about essential subjects like alphabets, names of fruits, animals, birds, plants, human body parts. The children are taught by different playful means as each child has their own sense of perception.

"Along with these, if a child is having trouble learning or remains absent-minded in the class, I try to bring to the forefront a topic that the child may feel comfortable with. I try to teach the child a new technique. Once the child feels comfortable, I try to teach them the new approach I adopted. For example, English alphabets, Assamese grammar, and human body parts are sometimes taught by singing, dancing, or acting so that the children may find it easier to comprehend them."

Differently-abled children are identified and are taken care of as they cannot progress at the same rate as another ten children. For this reason, they are given special attention so that they too may proceed in life. The Government should provide separate facilities for differently-abled children in Anganwadi centres. Kavita Sarkar also demanded that "for securing the future of mentally or physically challenged children, necessary steps should be taken and proper medical accessibility should be there".

At noon once the classes are over, Kavita visits her home for half an hour. In the home visit, she takes note of important topics, makes a report and comes forward to help people according to their needs. She states that the provision of smartphones by the Government has helped a lot, especially during the Covid-19 situation.

Unlike other days during Covid-19, the work of Anganwadi workers too underwent specific changes. Kavita Sarkar revealed her Lockdown experiences in this way: "On regular days, we would arrive at the Anganwadi centre by 8 in the morning and return by noon. Although there was no school yet, we didn't have any fixed work schedule during the lockdown. As there was no school to take note of each child's education and health, we would make door-to-door visits. We focused on weight checking, vaccination, nutritious diet, checking for anaemia and certain other elements-obeying all the Covid protocols, food was delivered to each child's home. Whether the parents have taken adequate care of the child is also something which we checked upon as the children were unable to visit the Anganwadi centres due to lockdown. Along with children, Anganwadi workers also accommodated in their workspace the needs and problems of pregnant women, lactating mothers, differently-abled people in rural areas.

Kuthurijhar village of Baksa district is located at a distance of three kilometres from Manas National Park. Sonari Goyari, a resident of this village, is an Anganwadi worker. She has been working as an Anganwadi worker for some years now. She is a prudent woman,

hailing from Assam's Bodo tribe. She makes us know that she is a respected figure in her village. The rustics greet her as 'Baidew' (a greeting of honour), on which she feels elated and considers the respect given a boon. She feels happy working for children, youth, differently-abled ones, pregnant and lactating women. She has become a source of inspiration for the rural folk. The roots of a child's holistic development and proper future lie in the all-around efforts made by the Anganwadi workers, says Goyari. She sheds light on her work experience during the past year's lockdown, "Food articles meant for children were distributed in every household by maintaining proper social distancing. We advised parents on weight checking of children, nutritious diet and taking necessary care of children. Also, nutritious food for pregnant and lactating women was provided by the Anganwadi centres, and they were made aware of how to consume a nutritious diet daily. We also emphasized important issues such as vaccination of children during the lockdown."

Ms. Goyari also stated that last year's lockdown rendered children from visiting the centres; the Anganwadi workers didn't sit idly at home for a single day. At that time, we were working to prevent the spread of Covid-19. We went door-to-door, explaining how they could save themselves and their families from the Coronavirus. Our duty was to make people aware of the infection and spread of Covid-19. To make people aware of appropriate Covid behaviour such as washing hands regularly, sanitization, remaining indoors, not roaming around unnecessarily, we went out and spread across villages. If a faraway outsider recently visited a house, it was noted. The family members were advised to remain indoors. We pasted stickers outside a house if someone in the household was covid positive. We, the Anganwadi workers with a single doctor, a nurse and an 'ASHA' worker, made the people aware of Covid and helped when need be. Being an Anganwadi worker, I feel delighted as I was able to serve the masses during the COVID-19 situation."

Ranu Sutradhar is a widow who works as a maid to feed a family of six. She is the only income source of her family. She has been responsible for providing her two sons, a girl, her ill father-in-law, and another widow relative for a few years. The boys and the girl of this impoverished family go to the Anganwadi centre. On regular days, Ranu Sutradhar used to leave her son, Ronit and daughter, Babli, at the centre before leaving for her daily work. She managed to provide for her house by receiving the meagre amount in return for her work. From morning 8 to noon, she managed to keep her children at the centre and would then work hard to earn a lump sum amount by which her livelihood went by somehow.

Additionally, the centre provided a healthy and nutritious diet for the children and their studies, which acted as an excellent relief for Ranu Sutradhar. But in the last lockdown, although the food for the children was provided by the Anganwadi centre, due to the closure of her daily job Sutradhar had to face untold misery in keeping her household intact. Her present livelihood status is complex. She is currently facing a deep financial crisis as she could not find any job due to the lockdown. Moreover, she couldn't send her children to the Anganwadi centre.

Anganwadi workers act as the lamp that brightens up upcoming generations' future. An Anganwadi supervisor, Nabanita Saha, states: "Anganwadi workers have aided our social structure to move ahead by one step. Anganwadi workers play a big role in the holistic development of future generations and their independence." In the last lockdown, she mentions that Anganwadi workers have worked tooth and nail to counter the pandemic. Going to each house and taking note of children's health, advising guardians on taking necessary steps to prevent Covid-19 and especially protecting children from the virus is something the workers have done wonderfully. Also, during the lockdown, they have taken care of each individual of the society. If an individual has visited a household from a distant place, the members are advised to remain indoors. Anganwadi workers did the job of keeping the individual in isolation. Genuinely speaking, Anganwadi workers are incredibly liable to society, and they do their duties with utmost sincerity. The Anganwadi supervisor mentioned that last year's lockdown has severely affected children's education. She states that although the beneficiaries such as pregnant women, lactating women and

babies, adolescent boys and girls have gained from the centre, the children have lagged in education.

During Lockdown, Anganwadi workers have distributed the food rations in such a manner so that no one was left behind. They have also worked to provide vaccination and treatment of differently-abled people and issue 'disability certificates' for them. The supervisor also stated that the Anganwadi workers contribute immensely towards social welfare. During the last year's lockdown, the Anganwadi workers desisted from remaining at home and toiled hard with the workers of the Department of Health to counter the pandemic.

Anganwadi workers at times worked individually to bring awareness in rural areas during the Covid situation. Making the common masses aware of the preventive measures to be taken for the virus and advising parents on how to keep the children safe from the virus were certain things that the Anganwadi workers did with utmost care and precision. For such social endeavours, Anganwadi workers are a symbol of inspiration for another ten women. They have done tremendously for the overall development of villages.

(Translated from Assamese to English)

What The Piling Bodies And Helplessness Are Doing To Our Overworked Health Workers

Shahina KK

4 May 2021, thefederal.com

Hyder Sherif, a junior health inspector in Kerala, was a tranquil, silent, diligent and workaholic person. According to his colleagues, he was a family man too, with very limited socialisation. He has not taken a holiday since April 2020, when the Covid-19 lockdown was announced in India. He took his laptop home even on Sundays, and worked round the clock like many other health workers. He never went to a cinema, dinner or took a holiday with his family for a year. Early this year, amid his relentless battle, Sherif tested positive. He took leave and quarantined himself at home for 14 days. But after that, he did not return to work. When colleagues tried to persuade him, he told them he had a serious mental block. "I was told that he used to take the lunch packed by his wife and go out as he used to do in the past (as if towards the hospital), but he never reached. It was late by the time we came to know about it," Raju, health inspector at the Family Health Centre at Vadakkekadu in Thrissur district, and a colleague of Sherif, told The Federal.

On February 18, Sherif hanged himself at his home. "After he survived Covid, he almost stopped going out and confined himself at home. His colleagues with a sense of guilt realise that they should have understood the alarming signs of stress and depression that he expressed. All of us are burnt out. Who is getting time to think about colleagues or even about ourselves?" asks Raju, who is yet to come out of the shock.

This might be a one-off incident but is a pointer to the mental battle Covid warriors fight in our country and across the world. "We have given special focus on the mental health of workers since the beginning" says Dr. Kiran, nodal officer for mental health in Kerala. A team of professionals were deployed to provide psychosocial support to frontline warriors on Covid duty from March 2020. "Initially we called each person on duty—from the doctor to the ASHAs on field—and reached out to them and to keep a track of their mental health," says Dr. Kiran, adding that the health workers were too busy to attend such calls. "We have often received furious responses from them saying that they had little time to engage with 'such calls as they were tightly packed with Covid duty,'" says Dr. Kiran.

Even then, mental health workers handled an exponential number of stress calls from Covid frontline warriors on duty. 128 stress management trainings were conducted since April 2020 in which 1,531 doctors, 1,169 nurses and 1,357 health inspectors participated. Around one lakh calls were made by the mental health team as a follow up of the stress and emotional turbulence experienced by health workers on Covid duty. "People adopt different mechanisms to cope with stress. In my case, focusing only on work round the clock was the option," says Dr. Shemeer, the nodal officer on Covid duty in Government Medical College, Kozhikode, who had also treated Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan when he was Covid positive. His Facebook note on his experience of being the doctor of the Chief Minister has gone viral.

Dr. Shemeer was assigned a lead role since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, counting on his experience in handling the deadly Nipah virus in 2018. "I was completely engaged in the Covid ward and hardly got time to sit back and think. I have trained myself to maintain my composure level, but our team still found it hard to handle the deaths. No matter how senior you are, every death will shatter you—both as a doctor and as an individual," says Dr. Shemeer. After a long battle in the Covid ward, Dr. Shemeer tested positive last week. "I am determined that I will not let myself down. I am only worried about the additional burden that my colleagues have to bear," says Dr. Shemeer.

Dr. Samin, psychiatrist at Government Hospital, Ernakulam, regularly receives calls and texts from healthcare workers on Covid duty, sharing the trauma and stress that they go through. He shares a text message from a doctor at a Covid hospital in Madhya Pradesh:

“What I see around is death and only death. I am falling into depression. I lost compassion. I have become a machine. I feel that life has no value any more.” “I tried to talk to him but he does not get time even to talk to me. These frontline warriors hardly get time to take care of themselves,” says Dr. Samin.

According to psychiatrists, the pandemic has had a severe impact on medical professionals in general and on those having problems of stress or clinical depression in particular. The burden of work, restrictions on mobility, exposure to a contagious disease and isolation have worsened such conditions.

A recent study by The Lancet journal published in February 2021 says that healthcare workers all over the world are exposed to tremendous levels of risk for anxiety, depression, burnout, insomnia, moral distress and post-traumatic stress disorder. There are multiple factors for these—heavy workload, inadequate training and infection control practices and guilt for being unable to save lives. The study also points out that some healthcare workers were burdened with emotionally and ethically fraught decisions about resource rationing and withholding infrastructure facilities as they have to prioritise.

“Many are badly hit with the fear of getting infected and being a carrier. In the first wave of Covid 19, the health workers were unable to go home. The emotional turbulence created by the isolation from the dear and near ones for weeks and months also triggered depression among health workers,” says Dr. Joseph Chacko of Government Medical College, Thiruvananthapuram. “I can give you examples of at least three residents from a premiere institute of the country who committed suicide last year, and some of them were suffering from mental illnesses like bipolar disease and schizophrenia,” says Dr. Mohemmad Arshad, a junior resident at the department of psychiatry in NIMHANS.

The pandemic has been a trigger to those who have already been suffering from clinical depression or bipolar diseases. According to him, there is a tangible rise in the number of healthcare workers seeking professional help for mental health. “Healthcare workers are already vulnerable to developing mental health problems considering the stress and burden they are facing due to the poorly managed healthcare system in the country. Even before the lockdown, we used to come across many undergraduate medical students and residents in the outpatient department with depressive and anxious presentations,” says Dr. Arshad. “Many of the HWs are not seeking help due to various reasons, and one among the strong reasons would be the burden on them,” he adds.

The chilling story of Shiny Varghese, a Malayali nurse working in the Covid ward in Manipal hospital, epitomises the unbeatable commitment, devotion and courage of every frontline worker in the battle against the pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Shiny has been on Covid duty. Four persons in her family got infected, including herself, her daughter, husband and father-in-law. Shiny’s husband and father-in-law succumbed to Covid last year. The deaths did not pull her back from her duty as a nurse. “I am seeing people every day who are in need of me. I can’t turn my back on them. This is my duty and responsibility,” Shiny tells The Federal. How did Shiny fight the trauma? As Dr. Shemeer of Calicut Medical College said, different people adopt different mechanisms. “Prayer,” says Shiny. “I am a believer; I pray and gain strength from God.”

Most health professionals that we talked to unanimously expressed a concern. Uncertainty is a major cause of anxiety. “Working overtime is not a problem if we have an idea of the period of time that we have to do it. Here in the case of Covid, we have absolutely no idea when it would end and when the world would go back to normal,” says Dr. Joseph of Thiruvananthapuram Medical College, adding that this is one reason for emotional fatigue. However, Shiny is clear about how to deal with it. “Live in the present. Live the moment and accomplish your responsibility. The rest is not in our hands, hence stop worrying about it” She says institutional support is a key factor in keeping health workers sane. “I received tremendous support from my authorities and my colleagues. Unfortunately, many health

workers do not get such institutional support.” She says that healthcare workers should not shy away from seeking professional help if required. “They must know it better than anyone else.”



COPING WITH THE PANDEMIC

UN Women clearly states how the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 are known to have fallen harder on women than on men. They've had to bear the brunt of care responsibilities as schools closed and family members fell ill, they were at greater risk of domestic violence, confined as they were with their abusers, and were disproportionately disadvantaged by reduced access to services and employment. Similarly, for children, the school dropout rates are worrisome as the government now anticipates a problem in ensuring quality human resources in the future. This section focuses on the most affected during the pandemic, women, especially ones in the unorganised sector and children.

Over 1.2 lakh children in India have lost a parent due to the pandemic according to a Lancet study. Jharkhand in India, is the state with the highest number of corona orphans as is written by Puja Singh in her article, 'कोरोना : राज्य में अनाथ हुए 1131 बच्चे , सरकार कर रही देखभाल'. Of 1131 orphaned children in Jharkhand, 159 are below the age of 6. The highest number of orphaned children are from Ranchi.

Jaipur-based Madhav Sharma's article, 'Rajasthan's Girls Fight For A Chance To Resume Their Education', describes the campaign launched by 1500 girls in Karauli, Rajasthan, urging the state government to help them go back to school. As family incomes drop, every second girl in the Karauli district is getting married before she reaches the age of 18. The situation only got worse in the pandemic, as girls' education came to a halt and marriage was considered the only option.

Aritra Bhattacharya, in his article, 'COVID Has Made Many Kids In West Bengal Dropouts, But There's No Official Data On That', describes how during the pandemic, school education was virtually closed in West Bengal. Online education only catered to 5% to 6% of the total school students in the State. Aritra writes that the most significant fear of the third wave will be the complete loss of educational opportunities and disengagement with education, for children.

Confinement fostered tension and stress created by security, health, and money concerns during the lockdown resulted in an alarming rise in domestic Violence. While lockdowns may have decreased the spread of the virus it had created an environment that increased domestic violence against women.

In his article, 'Atrocities On Women Rise In Rajasthan During The Covid Pandemic', Madhav Sharma writes about the crisis women faced in Rajasthan. According to Madhav, July 2020 to July 2021 reported an increase of 24 per cent in crimes against women in Rajasthan.

Hyderabad-based Avula Yamuna, in her translated article, 'Corona Kastalu Adavallake Akkuva (Corona Difficulties Are More For Women)', brings forth a similar argument by pointing out the social and economic insecurities that make women stay in abusive relationships rather than reporting their partners.

While most people's lives and work have been negatively affected by the crisis, overall, women's jobs and livelihoods have been most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic according to UN reports. The magnitude of the inequality is striking. 'Women In Black: What One-And-Half Years Of No Work Means For Female Bouncers In Delhi', by Poorvi Gupta tells us the story of Mehrunissa, the first female bouncer in Delhi and her struggle for survival after she lost her work. Living in a slum with her aged parents and siblings, she had broken several stereotypes, but the pandemic wreaked havoc in her life which came to a standstill. She comes from a conservative family and had to fight the stereotypes imposed.

While most people's lives and work have been negatively affected by the crisis, Mckinsey & Co analyses that overall, women's jobs and livelihoods are more vulnerable to the COVID-19

pandemic. This is aptly described in the article, 'Coronavum Pengalin Velai Ilapum, (Corona And Its Ripple Effect On Careers For Women)', by Tamil Nadu-based Indumathy G. Her article tells us that statistics reveal that 7% more women, in general, have lost jobs compared to men affecting their mental health and denying them access to fundamental rights like insurance etc.

While many in the unorganised sector could make ends meet after the first wave of the coronavirus, with the second wave, the unemployment rate in India further surged sharply, with one crore Indians losing their jobs. The average household income witnessed a 97 percent decline since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, said the Chief Executive of Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) Mahesh Vyas.

Kerala-based Shafeeq T, in all three of his articles, puts the spotlight on the women in the unorganised sector and their tumultuous journey through the pandemic and its aftermath. 'Aa Thozhilali Sthreekal Enginayinnu Jeevikkunnu' (How Do Those Women Workers Live Now?); describes how the women in the unrecognised sector have now been pushed into the darkness of uncertainty.

In a similar story titled 'Veettujoli Cheythurunna Aa Thozhilali Sthreekal Evide Poyi? (What Happened To Those Domestic Help Workers Who Used To Work At Your Homes?)' Shafeeq questions the reader if they were aware of the plight of their domestic workers during the pandemic. His third story, 'Jeevan Panayam Vechu Joli Cheythittum Avaganana Mathram (Ignorance Is The Only Reward Even After Putting Life At Stake For Work)', similarly tells us the tale of road cleaners and garbage collectors in Kerala.

'Grehokarmir Lockdown Poristhitir Chabi (Domestic Workers Struggle During The Lockdown)', by Jahida Parbin, also describes the life of a domestic worker during the pandemic and how women employed in this sector report food insecurity, financial and social exclusion.

'Unheard Life Of Single Women From Unorganised Sector' and 'Single Women: Need For More Inclusive Policies On Social Security', both written by Pune-based Priyanka Tupe, emphasises the issues faced by domestic workers and single women in the unorganised sector without any relief from the government. She notes how the pandemic-induced poverty surge also affects single women already living in paltry conditions with no one to take care of them.

Avula Yamuna in her article, 'Ontaraina Amma...Corona Tho Pillalaki Dooram (Mothers Isolated In Most Families Due To Corona Pandemic)', writes about the loneliness women face during the pandemic, especially mothers. She describes how women have been at the receiving end of the pandemic in every way, from having to look after families, work and worry about children studying away from their homes, who were unable to make it home due to the lockdown.

कोरोना : राज्य में अनाथ हुए 1131 बच्चे, सरकार कर रही देखभाल

पूजा सिंह

27 अगस्त 2021, प्रभात खबर

**कोरोना: रांची में अनाथ हुए 1131 बच्चे सरकार कर रही देखभाल
सुप्रीम कोर्ट में राज्य सरकार ने अनाथ हुए बच्चों का दिया ब्यौरा
अनाथ हुए 1131 बच्चों में 159 बच्चों की उम्र 6 साल से कम है
583 बच्चों की प्रतिमा 2000 रुपये की आर्थिक सहायता दे रही सरकार
106 बच्चों ने अपने माता-पिता दोनों को खोया
1012 बच्चों के माता-पिता में से किसी एक की हुई मौत**

रांची: कोरोना से हुई मौत की वजह से झारखंड के 1131 बच्चे अनाथ हुए हैं। अनाथ हुए बच्चों को राज्य सरकार आर्थिक मदद सहायता दे रही है। स्कूल में पढ़ रहे अनाथ बच्चों को फीस माफ करने के लिए संबंधित जिलों के उपायुक्त को आवश्यक निर्देश दिए गए हैं। सुप्रीम कोर्ट में चल रहे मामले में दाखिल शपथपत्र में राज्य सरकार इन तथ्यों का उल्लेख किया है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने स्वतः संज्ञान लेते हुए कोरोना में अनाथ हुए बच्चों की देखभाल करने का निर्देश दिया था। साथ ही सभी राज्यों को अनाथ हुए बच्चों का ब्यौरा और उन्हें दी जाने वाली सहायता के सिलसिले में शपथ पत्र दायर करने का निर्देश दिया गया था। इस निर्देश के आलोक में राज्य सरकार ने सुप्रीम कोर्ट में शपथ पत्र दायर किया है। राज्य सरकार की ओर से दायर शपथ पत्र में इस बात का उल्लेख है कि कोरोना के दौरान 1131 बच्चे अनाथ हुए हैं।

इनमें से 159 बच्चों की उम्र 6 साल से कम है। 106 बच्चों ने कोरोना के दौरान अपने माता-पिता दोनों को खोया है। 1012 बच्चों के माता-पिता में से किसी एक की मौत हुई है। राज्य सरकार आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर 583 बच्चों को आर्थिक सहायता दे रही है। इन बच्चों को प्रति माह 2000 रुपये की दर से आर्थिक सहायता दी जा रही है। कोरोना की वजह से अनाथ हुए बच्चों में से 972 बच्चे स्कूल जाते हैं। इनमें से 530 बच्चे राज्य के विभिन्न जिलों में सरकारी स्कूलों में पढ़ रहे हैं। 442 बच्चे निजी स्कूलों में पढ़ रहे हैं। सरकार ने उपायुक्त को यह निर्देश दिया है कि इन बच्चों की फीस माफ कराए।

रांची में सबसे ज्यादा 1181 बच्चे हुए अनाथ

राज्य सरकार की ओर से दायर आंकड़ों में इस बात का उल्लेख है कि राजधानी रांची में अनाथ होने वाले बच्चों की संख्या सबसे ज्यादा है। रांची में कुल 181 बच्चे अनाथ हुए हैं। इनमें 24 बच्चे ऐसे हैं जिन्होंने कोरोना काल में अपने माता पिता दोनों को खोया है। 157 बच्चों ने अपने माता-पिता में से किसी एक को खोया है। रांची के बाद धनबाद सबसे ज्यादा प्रभावित हुआ है। धनबाद में कोरोना से 123 बच्चे अनाथ हुए हैं। इनमें से 122 बच्चों ने अपने माता-पिता में से किसी एक को खोया है। सिर्फ एक बच्चे के माता-पिता की मौत हुई है। राज्य सरकार जिन 583 बच्चों को प्रतिमाह 2000 रुपये देने की आर्थिक सहायता दे रही है। उनमें सबसे ज्यादा बच्चे पूर्वी सिंहभूम जिला के हैं। इस जिला में 93 बच्चों को प्रतिमा आर्थिक सहायता दी जा रही है। राजधानी रांची में 81 बच्चों को आर्थिक सहायता दी जा रही है। कोरोना काल में अनाथ हुए बच्चों में से सबसे ज्यादा रांची में 94 बच्चे निजी स्कूल में पढ़ रहे हैं। पूर्वी सिंहभूम में 72 बच्चे निजी स्कूलों में पढ़ रहे हैं।

Rajasthan's Girls Fight For A Chance To Resume Their Education

Madhav Sharma

14 June 2021, 101reporters.com

The pandemic has directly affected millions of lives in the country and the lockdown has cost many their livelihoods. For Priyanka Bairwa, a 19-year-old girl who lives in Sapotra town in the Karauli district of Rajasthan, the lockdown not only took away her family's source of income but also her dreams of pursuing higher education. But soon, she realised she wasn't the only girl whose dreams were getting shattered. She met many like her, who were unable to continue their education and were now being forced into marriage. Priyanka, and a few others, started a campaign to raise awareness about these issues and put pressure on their elders to help ensure all girls have the right to education. The campaign, which started in October 2020 with 10 girls in one district is today, a state-wide campaign involving six districts and over 1,500 girls. Their demands for scholarships and support for higher education have also been sent to the government of Rajasthan and the girls hope for a change in the right direction.

Priyanka's story

Since Priyanka's father, Madanlal, was suffering from tuberculosis, the responsibility of providing for the family rested primarily on her mother, Urmila and the older kids. Urmila worked as domestic help and Priyanka would often help her mother with the chores in different homes; that is until the first lockdown was announced, more than a year ago. The lockdown meant that Urmila and Priyanka could no longer work in other homes and they soon lost their livelihood. Much to her disappointment, Priyanka, who was pursuing her Bachelor of Arts degree, was also unable to continue her studies, due to limited means. Being the oldest girl in the house, soon there were talks of arranging her marriage. But Priyanka vehemently opposed the idea. "Corona destroyed the dreams of thousands of poor girls like me. Studies came to a halt and there was no work outside, so the family started talking about marriage. Friends and relatives put a lot of pressure on me to get married, but I stood my ground and opposed it," she said. Early marriage or child marriage is very common in the rural regions of Rajasthan. According to AMIED (Alwar Mewar Institute of Education and Development), a non-profit organization working in the rural areas of Rajasthan, every second girl in Karauli district is married off before she reaches the age of 18. And the situation only got worse in the pandemic, as the education of girls came to a halt and girls began to be viewed as a burden on families. Priyanka soon realised that many young girls were being married off without their consent. "I realised many girls in Sapotra would have dropped out of studies and they may be getting pressured into marriage. I met a few other girls and soon a group of 10 girls was formed," reminisces Priyanka. With 10 girls, Priyanka felt she could now work to ensure girls from her area got a chance to study and avoid marriage. "We went from village to village in Sapotra tehsil on foot and we met many girls who were facing similar situations at home. We persuaded them to join us and we all decided to work together to prevent girls from getting married at an early age and help them continue their education," said Priyanka with pride.

The beginning of a movement

Priyanka's mother was engaged in cleaning work at the AMIED office in Sapotra. "I knew that AMIED works for education and girl's education was one of their primary objectives. I, hence, approached them and they agreed to help us," states Priyanka. The organisation soon imparted training on health and education to the ten girls.

But Priyanka's parents were afraid. Initially, they stopped her from venturing out too much as they believed the current society is not safe for girls to travel alone. Many parents had similar fears and in addition, most of the villagers felt that no one would pay heed to the demands of a few young girls. But thankfully, AMIED stepped in and convinced many parents to allow their daughters to participate in the campaign. They said, if it succeeds,

then girls' education could be free in the future. After much convincing, some parents, including Priyanka's, gave their consent and the girls continued their campaign.

Vinita Meena, a resident of Gokulpur village in Sapotra tehsil, is today one of the leaders campaigning for the cause. During the lockdown, Vinita's housemates were considering marrying her off. But Vinita opposed the marriage and soon joined Priyanka in the campaign. "The girls we talked to had two things in common. First, the pressure to get married and second, the fear of dropping out of school. Poverty, negligible participation in online classes, lack of awareness and lack of schools that provide education after standard 8 are the main reasons for dropping out of school," says Vinita. Talking about the support they received from AMIED, Vinita says, "The AMIED institute gave counselling and training to the 10 girls. We then realised that just 10 girls will not work. That is why we selected two girls from each village in the neighbouring 50 villages as leaders who can lead the campaign. We were now 100 girls campaigning for the cause," says Vinita.

The group leaders of the villages chalked out a plan of action and thus the foundation of the Dalit-Adivasi Backward Class Kishori Shiksha Abhiyan was laid. Noor Mohammed, the director of AMIED explains, "The campaign was named Dalit-Adivasi Backward Class Kishori Shiksha Abhiyan as the impact of the lockdown was most felt by the girls belonging to Dalit and Adivasi communities. They did not have smartphones for online classes. Thousands of girls from standards 9 to 12 were also afraid of being dropped out. This group of 10 girls is supported by our organization as their mentor."

Gaining traction

In collaboration with AMIED, the girls now held regular meetings in the villages with other girls and their families. They made a list of demands which included timely scholarship for studies and free education up to class 12. Along with this, a demand was made to give a one-time scholarship of Rs 5,000 to those entering college, which should be paid all at once, so as to meet the requirements of buying books and other course material. This would ensure that girls not only have the opportunities to study up till class 12 but also pursue higher education, while also reducing the financial burden on their families. Currently, the scholarships offered by the government are paid in instalments and are not sufficient to cover all expenses.

To further intensify the campaign, the girls reached out to the political heads of the district including the Sarpanch (village headman), MLA and other stake-holders. Memorandums about the campaign were given to the sarpanches of the different villages. A group of girls also met the Labour Minister, Government of Rajasthan, Tikaram Jolly. The minister's positive attitude towards the campaign gave an impetus to it. Rajasthan's Education Minister, Govind Singh Dodasara, also praised the campaign. They soon sent emails to Rajasthan Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot and the education minister, listing their demands.

On March 9 and 10 this year, AMIED organised a state-level conference in Jaipur to arrange a meeting of the girls associated with the campaign from different districts. It was named Rajasthan Rising Manch. Its aim was to understand the issues of girl child education, organisation, gender and caste discrimination among girls.

A campaign to alleviate poverty

Priyanka, who is currently struggling to arrange two square meals a day for her family emphasises the importance of the campaign. "During the lockdown, it was with the help of our neighbours in Sapotra that we were able to feed ourselves. My brother, Tejaram (16) is a student of standard 11. He gets up at 4 am to study and distribute newspapers. Then he goes to work in the vegetable market, and then he goes to school. In the evening, he works to keep the goods inside. It's a tough life for all of us," she says. She believes educating girls may help lift many families out of poverty. "There are many families, like ours, that are struggling to make ends meet. If we girls become something by studying, then it will be good for our family as well as the society, at large. I also want to do good for my society.

That is why I dream of pursuing a B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) after graduation. So that I can become a teacher and teach girls who cannot get an education due to poverty or other circumstances.”

Varsha Bairwa, a standard 10 student who has been associated with the campaign since November last year, believes the success of this campaign can completely change the situation for girls in her village. “Girls in my village have to walk 2 km to school. That is why only one girl from the whole village goes to study besides me. People from the rest of the village taunt us while we go to school. That is why I wish this campaign is a success,” says Varsha.

Covid Has Made Many Kids In West Bengal Dropouts, But There's No Official Data On That

Aritra Bhattacharya

26 August 2021, indiatimes.com

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Rules, 2010 mandate that the local administration must maintain a record of all children aged 0-14 years, including information on the school and class they are enrolled in, if they have dropped out of school and the reasons for the same. Rules also mandate that the record must be updated annually through a door-to-door household survey, and out of school children must be provided special training/ measures to address their requirements.

Evidently, the surveys are designed to identify cases of dropouts or out of school children, which increase as children proceed from primary to middle to high school, data from precious years show. But while several news reports and research studies indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a spike in dropout rates and contributed to child labour and child marriage, especially among girls, there is little or no official data on dropouts. The Unified District Information System for Education Plus database under the Ministry of Education was last updated in 2019-20, before the pandemic arrived in India. The gap in official data is largely because most states – education is a state subject – did not initiate household surveys as mandated in the RTE rules during the pandemic fearing a spike in infection rates and heightened vulnerability for personnel conducting surveys.

In such circumstances, experiences from an ongoing door-to-door survey in Asansol, West Bengal as mandated under the rules show that the pandemic has severely disrupted the usual survey methodology and introduced numerous challenges, affecting accuracy and reliability of generated data. Policy experts said the lack of comprehensive, reliable data on school dropouts was severely affecting government efforts to plan and implement interventions addressing emerging concerns, including the heightened vulnerability of girls from poor, marginalized communities to child marriage.

Blow to education, childhood

While some reports indicated that children were at greater risk in the subsequent third wave of the pandemic, activists and civil society groups in West Bengal contended that the real impact of the pandemic on children lay in their complete disengagement with education.

Atrocities On Women Rise In Rajasthan During Covid Pandemic

Madhav Sharma

10 September 2021, countercurrents.org

The Covid pandemic has adversely affected every section of society in some way or the other in India. The biggest impact, in social and economic terms, however, seems to have been on women, for whom the pandemic period has been a nightmare of sorts. Crimes against women have increased significantly as per the monthly crime reports of Rajasthan Police. From July 2020 to July 2021, there has been an increase of 24 percent in crimes against women in Rajasthan. From 2020 till July, a total of 18455 cases of atrocities against women such as dowry murder, dowry suicide, female harassment, rape, molestation, kidnapping and other crimes were registered. At the same time, till July this year, 22,970 cases of the same offenses have been registered. This is an increase of 24 percent. The biggest increase has been in cases of female harassment, rape and molestation. In 2020, whereas 6872 cases of harassment were registered across Rajasthan during the entire year, 9347 cases have been registered by mid-2021 alone. Similarly, rape cases have increased from 2972 to 3717.

At the same time, the cases of molestation have increased from 4894 to 5202. Cases of abduction of women have also increased by 35 percent from 2659 to 3602. The worsening condition of women in Rajasthan becomes very clear when one sees the NFHS-4 figures. According to the survey, 25.1 % of married women in the age group of 15-49 years in Rajasthan have faced some kind of violence in their homes. At the same time, 1.4 % of women face violence while pregnant.

Reasons for increased violence

Women have paid a big price for staying at home with men during the lockdown. To know the reason for the increased crimes against women during the Covid period, we talked to Dr. Rajiv Gupta, retired professor from the Sociology Department of Rajasthan University. According to him, "Due to the lockdown, for the first-time people stayed in homes for a long time together. Due to this, disputes between husbands and wives also increased. Similarly, when working women also stayed at home for the first time, they faced the same problem. For example, due to lack of understanding of each other and other family problems, quarrels increase in the houses. Apart from this, thousands and lakhs of people's jobs were also lost due to the lockdown. Men took out their frustrations on the women at home." Dr. Rajiv further explains that the hypocrisy of our society is at the root of the atrocities committed on women due to dowry. There was a ban on marriages during the lockdown and only a few marriages were allowed. While this saved expenditure on conduct of the marriages, the money saved was sought in the form of dowry on behalf of the boys. Those women whose marriages took place shortly before the Covid pandemic were also harassed for dowry. That is why the figures of dowry deaths and suicides have increased.

Atrocities on Dalit women also increased

The impact of Covid on Dalit women in particular has been significant. They have suffered more violence than ordinary women. Data from Rajasthan Police records show that rapes against Dalit women have increased by 28 percent between 2020 and 2021. Till July 2020, 272 cases of rape were registered in the state, while in 2021 during the same period, 350 cases of rape of Dalit women have been registered.

Bhanwar Meghvanshi, a well-known social worker and Dalit thinker, discusses the socio-economic reasons for this phenomenon. He says, "We should not look at the effect of Covid only from the point of view of health. It has had many deep social impacts on many sections of the society. Its impact will remain on society for many years to come. If we talk about the downtrodden class and especially women, then Covid has affected the Dalit women to a great extent. Violence against them in families has increased. Most of the people are engaged in wage labour or petty work, which were completely closed during the lockdown.

Men fell into depression due to lack of work. Many got addicted to drugs and it directly affected the women of the house. Also, Dalit girls who got educated and advanced socially had to stop their studies due to lack of funding.”

On the increasing incidents of molestation and rape of women, Prof. Gupta says, “After the lockdown, when the government started relaxing restrictions and the markets and offices re-opened. As people also started coming out of their homes the violence hidden inside them also came out. The biggest impact of this violence was on women. Since most men consider women physically weak, they target women due to the violence within themselves. ‘The police have also been far behind in investigating the increased crimes against women. According to the July 2021 report of Rajasthan Police, 32.62 percent of women’s atrocities i.e. 7492 cases were pending for investigation. However, in 8,194 cases, police have presented challans and 46.94 (7266) cases have been found to be fake. A total of 22,970 cases of atrocities have been registered till July this year.

Decreasing incomes forces girls to leave school

Suman Devthia, who runs the Dalit Women’s Fight organization, holds the society as well as the government responsible for the condition of Dalit women during the Covid period. She says, “Loss of work reduced the income of families, so they stopped teenage girls from going to school. Thousands of girls in Rajasthan have been married off during the Covid period at the age of 15-16 years after leaving school.”

Suman further says, “The government has not made any special arrangements to bring back the children, especially girls, who missed their studies during the Covid period.”

According to a report by UNICEF, about one crore children across the country are at risk of missing out on their studies due to Covid.

Pandemic impact on women’s health

Women have not been able to access health services during the Covid period. In Rajasthan, during 2020-21, only 57% of the pregnant women got the Albendazole tablets they required for deworming. In the year 2021-22 also, this tablet could reach only 54 percent pregnant women. Similarly, in 4.9% of pregnant women, hemoglobin levels were found to be between 7 and 11. Any value below 12 is considered as iron deficiency and below 10.5 as anaemia. The NFHS-4 data also shows that 46.8 % women in the age group of 15-49 years in Rajasthan are suffering from anaemia. At the same time, 46.6 % of pregnant women are anaemic.

According to experts, regular vaccination of pregnant women during Covid has also been greatly affected. In the words of Chhaya Patchouli, director of Prayas Sanstha, which works in the field of health in Rajasthan, “Women are not able to access reproductive services. There is increased workload at home, financial crisis and even domestic violence are being seen. Due to the closure of Anganwadis during the lockdown services for children, pregnant women and nutrition programs for lactating women has also almost stopped.” Chhaya points out that right now, at the national or state level, no comprehensive study has been done by the government or other research institutions, to understand the impact of Covid. But according to some estimates, 40 lakh women across the country may be deprived of hospital delivery services due to Covid related obstacles.

According to Chhaya, there could be a 52% increase in maternal deaths and 40% increase in infant mortality rate. Apart from this, due to reduced access to contraceptive means, the number of pregnancies without the consent of women will also increase. This increase and lack of access to abortion services can also increase the number of unsafe abortions”.

Corona Kastalu Adavallake Akkuva (Corona Difficulties Are More For Women)

Avula Yamuna

27 April 2021, V6 Velugu

కరనోవీరపంపం మజ్జాత్తశ్శనో అతలకుతలం చనేరీదో. చనేత్తరేదో. ఇదంతా ఒక ఎత్తయితో మేహళల మదీ కరనోవీర పరభవం మరకశ్శత ఎకక్కువగశ్శీఉందో. అదలెంఅంటుర? కరనోవీరయరడమకల్లో మేహళల మదీ గృహహాసిన బశ-పరగీదో.

పయరడమకల్లో గృహహాసిన మన దశేశక్తిపరమితం కలదే. పరపంపంపయశ్శతంగా ఎంతోమందో ఆడవళ్ళలు గృహహాసిన ఎదురకన్వననరు. ఇటలీ, యూరప్ దశేలలోనో గృహహాసిన పరగీదో. అలశ్శపరశ్శిల్లో గృహహాసిన 30 శతం పరగీదో. సప్యెనో, చైనలలోనో ఇదపేరసిధ్ధత. అగరరజ్శయం అమరకలలోనో గృహహాసిన 21 శతం పరగీదో. ఈ వసరలలోనో ఆయా దశేల మడియీ సంస్థల సేవయంగా వలెలడపివయ. యూఎస్ సట్టపీనో ఇదపేలీదో. కానో సర్వీ ఆన్ కరమనోల జనట్టసి పయలెనోనో ప్నాచనేన రజ్శయలలో పరపంపంపయశ్శతంగా యవరజేగో 8.1 శతం గృహహాసిన పరగీదినో తలీదో. ఇవపేవశ్శేల మదీ లకైకపట్టె చబెతునన లకైకలు కడు. జతయీ మహళ-కమషనో పకకలకైకలు తసీ తలీచిదో. వరలకైకలకైక ఆరగనజ్శేనో, యూనసిఫ్, అమరకనో జరనలో ఆఫ్ ఎమరజనోనో మడసినిల మట కూడ ఇదో మరకన్వనో పరేనన సంస్థలు చనేన సరపలీలలోనో ఇదపేషయం బయటపడపిదో. కవేలం మన దశేలలోనో కడు. పరపంపంపయశ్శతంగా పయరడమకల్లో గృహహాసిన పరగీదో. ఇదకైకటకైకకుండ పట్టెలపననలైగెక వధీమలు పరగీయ. మన దగగర ఎలాఉందో పరసిధ్ధత అనోషీటమ్ పరనోనో రురెరకు వశ్శలో అడగితో... వళ్ళలు ఇలాచవెమకచోచరు.

ఒత్తడనో కరణంగా చూపిచో.

నగశ్శే (పరేమరచుర) ఒక ఎమమనోనో సీకయనో సీ డీదయగో. పయన ఏడదాకరనో టైల డీదయగో పయేరీదో. బయటకశ్శేల డీదయగో వత్తకక్కున పేరసిధ్ధతులు లమే. ఎకకడ ఓపనగిగనో లమే. ఏం చయలలో ర్థం కశో పరసిధ్ధత. ఇటలీ డీదయగో రజ్శేత-భశ్శయత-పేటీలట. కవేం ఎకక్కువయతో ఆమనో కట్టిటడం. పయరడమకల్లో లఫ్ఫైల అయన గృహహాసిన కనీలలో ఓకటో ఇదో. అలశ్శపేరకైక ఫరమో హామో సట్టెరనో త్త-భీ-శ్శయవ్నాచయ్యో చనేకునన కనీలూ కళోలెలు. ఈ వషయలకైకకుండ కరనోవీరయరడమకల్లో, బయటకశ్శేలకుండ ఇటలీనో డీదయగో సరీవడం వలల కలగిన చశ్శకులనో ఇటలీ డీదయగో ఆడవళ్ళలపననో చూపిచరు చలమందో. కశో, వటలీలకైకనో మత్తరమపేయటకచోచయ.

ఎంత వరకు కరకైక?

కరణలవేత్తనేరే భశ్శయనో హాసినపిడం ఎంతవరకు కరకైక? సట్టెరనో ఎకక్కువనందనో తలలతో పాపిచరు. నశ్శనతో పట్టిలడరు. చలెలనో, అకకనో కట్టిటరు. ఫరరడనో, ఇతర ఫయమతి మరెరనో త్త-పయగో పరవరకైకపిచరు. అలశ్శరెదుకంట సేమజలం పీవరతో... ఎలమరెగలతోలెను. కశో, భశ్శయ వషయ శ్శాచోచనేరకొ అవనోనో ఎందుకు మరచపేత్తిననరు? నచన వంట వండలదేనో, టైకటో, కఫలీ ఇవవలదేనో... చయ్యో చనేకుననో వళ్ళలూ ఎకక్కువ. ఇలటో కనీల మన చుట్టపకకల కూడ కనపిసిత్తుంటయ. భశ్శయనో గరరటడగో తసీకవేడం వలల గృహహాసిన పరగుతయే అనడలం పిటవంట అనుమనం లదే. భశ్శయ ఏం చనేనో పడుతుందో అనన ఆలచేనల నుంపేళో హాసిన పడుతుందో అంటుననరు సకైకజసిట్టలు. మరో ఇలటో పరసిధ్ధతులు ఎదురననవేమడ ఆడవళ్ళలు కనీలు పట్టికవవేడ శ్శాచోకరణలరే?

కరణలరేటుంటో...

యానమనో హలెత్తో మనసిట్టరీ రిక్కి చనేన నవేనలో ఫయమతి హలెత్తో సరపేరకరం పరతం మగగరు ఆడవళ్ళలలో ఓకరు గృహహాసిన ఎదురకయిననరు. 27 శతం మందో ఆడవళ్ళలు పదహానేళ్ళే లపోశ-శరీక హాసినకగరమతుననరు. “పయరడమకల్లో లకైకలననో పదపిటలు పరగీయ. కశో, వటలీలలో తరకు బయటకు రలదే. కరణం... ధరయం లకైకవేడమో కవలయట్ట చనేత్త హేసిన ఇంకా బకక్కువ అమతుందో. సమజం తకక్కువగ-శ్శానో అనో చలమందో కనీలు పట్టిటలదే. కుటుంబ పరమ, పట్టిల పరసిధ్ధత విమమతుందనన ఆలచేనతో వనకకైక తగగిన వళ్ళలూ ఉననరు. మఖయంగా పట్టిటపిటో వళ్ళలు ఆదరపిచవతో పేటరగో బతకలమేమే అనన భయతో గృహహాసిన చలవరకు గడపదటలదే. దురద్యవ్పటమరేటుంటే భరత్తకైకడు అతడో తపేటట్టమలు, తలలొరడరలు కూడ గృహహాసిన లభగం ఉంటుననరు” నోచవెపరు హకైకేట అడవకట్టే నయ్యద లయక్కి ఉనననో.

కుటుంబం తడో ఉంటుంద!

అమమయినో... కుటుంబవరుమ అనో ఫలీమతశు కదెరు తలదండ్రులు. చదువు, ఉద్యోగం, పశ్చలం. ఆ తరపత మబధ్యత తరీనటటేఅనుకుంటుననశు. 'పశ్చలం తరపత చనన శతకానమనయలు నహజం.. సరద్రుకుపవేల' అనో నచవజవెత్తుననశు. 'భరత తడో లకేవశోపేల?' అంటురు. ఆడవశ్చలు కనీపటెటనో తడోండోతలదండ్రులు చలాతకకువ. పలేసిలు యకషన తసికునోలవోసరద్రువవే ఆడపలీలనో అతతరటికీ పయతుననశు. చలాకనీలు బయటకీ రకవవేడశకీ, ఆడవశ్చలపై హరిన పరెడశకీ ఇదో కూడ ఒక కరణమే

అలచేనలలొమరపు రవలీ

“ఇలఠి పరసిధత్తులలొమరపు రవలంటి.. అలచేనలలొమరపు రవలీ. భరతయ అంటిమూడు మాటలా వంట వయేలీ. ఇంటిచకకబటెటకవేలీ.. భరత, పలీల బగణీలు చానుకవేలీ. ఆరధక వషయలొపేలే పటెటకూడదు. భరత ఏం వనీసి బదురు చవేపకూడదు. భరత మూడనోబటటోనడుచుకవేలీ. గరగసినటటెట ఈ సరకలీలవేలభరతయ జవేతం తరుగుతుంటుందో ఎకకువగా? ఆ గరలీ ఆడవశ్చలనో చూడడం మననీత్రో గృహహరిన ఎకకడ జరగదు. ఇలాజరగంటిమగవశ్చల అలచేనలలొమరపు రవలీ. భరతయంటిపనత్తుమ కదనో వశ్చలకీ అరధం కవలీ. మగవశ్చల అలచేనలలొమరపు రవలీ వరకు గృహహరిన కననశుతూనో ఉంటుందో” అంటుననశు ఫయమలీకాననలెరనహశు.

వదనపతవచనీ తంట

మాజ(పరీమరచత) ఓ పరవైట్ సకూలలొవనమిదోతరగతం చదువుతదో. అనలనలొపతలు వటిదో. ఒకరజ్జీ ననీ నీ కలశమటె అంటూ వదనపలొపూజకీ మనెజ్జే పటెటరిదో ఒకమమయి. ఇదద్రో మధయ మటలు కలశయి. ఒకరజ్జీ ఉననటటండో ఆ అమమయినో యూడ పకచరషరీ చనీరిదో. 'నఫరడెన కేదా నువమూ షరీ చయయి' అననదో. ఆ మటల మయలొపేడనీ మాజ కూడ భటెటేయరిచిదో. ఫటెటేయక 'ననీ నీ ఫరడెనో కడు. మీబయలేజీటచరనో అననజిం బయటపటెటడు. 'నువమ నయూడ పడియి పేవకవశ్చనీ ఫటెటేయలొ చనీతశ' నో బదరీచడు. ఇదోలకడనలొ హదరబడ షీటమీనలొ ఫటెటే అయన కనీలొ ఒకటో. టచరలొ కేడు బంధుమలు కూడ పలీల పనోమన నులపై చలా గయలు వశేరు.

తలెసిని వశ్చలపేకకువ

పయతడమకలొనమదేన లనెక వధేమల కనీలొనరిదత్తులు 60 శతం తలెసిని వశ్చలనీనో షీ టరీ రకరడెనో చబెతుననయి. ఆ వషయం ఇంటలొ చవేత్తనమమరమే, తడతరమే, కడతరమే అనన భయతలొపేలమందో పలీల తమ బధలనో తలదండ్రులకీ చవేమకలీకే వయేరు. కదెరు తమవలెనెక హరిన జరగిరిదనన వషయననో కూడ తలెనుకలీకేవయేరు. సంతషీలలొననీ వషయం ఏంటంటిచలమందో పరేయెనో వషయం తలెసిక కనీలు పటెటడశకీ ముందుకచెచనీ, కదెరు కనీనో మధయలొనీ వనకకీ తసికుననశు.

భయమనీత్రయో..

ఆడపలీలపై జరగిదడులు చానత్తుంటిభయమనీత్రయోదో. నకూ ఒక కూతురు ఉందో. రవేటో రజ్జీన తనకీ ఏమనో జరగితే అనన అలచేననీ పటెటకలీనీ ననీ. అందుకనో జరగత్రతలొననీ ఉంటావెవమడూ. అయకేకుండో నాకడొకకొ ఆడపలీలతలొ ఎలా పరవరత్తరివలొ చవేత్తుంటా? పరతం పరేయె మగపలీలడనో నవేలొ వలయూన త్రపేవతే ఆడపలీలలు నవచేభగతరగలగుతరు.

- కడేశ్చర, గృహణి

పయకలొమరపు రవలీ

మగపలీల పయకలొమరపు వనత్తే హహరిన జరగదు. సకనయవలొ అబయూజకనీలు ఉండమ. పరతం ఆడపలీలనో గారవరివలనో చనన పటెటనరిచి తలొ దండ్రులు మగపలీలకీ చవేపలీ. ఆడవశ్చలొపేశ్చలు ఎలా పరవరత్తరివలొననశు? అనలు ఆడవశ్చలొ పటెట వశ్చలొ అలచేన వధనం ఎలా ఉందో? అనీ వషయలు చనన పటెటనరిచి గమనరివలీ. ఆడవశ్చలొపై తవమడం అభవరయలు ఉననటటెట అనపసిత్తవశ్చలొకొ కాననలెరిగి ఇవపలీ.

- బీ. పరభకర, హదరబడ

అవగణన పరెవలె

వ్యయం కష్టం చేసే మడియూ వడకం పరగింది. పరిలకం ఫోన్ కంపలనరి అయ్యింది. ఫోన్ వళ్ళు చిత్రీకావడం వరకు 'ఓకీ. కనీ, వళ్ళు ఫోన్ లో ఏం చనేతున్నాను? ఏం చూసేతున్నాను? ఎవరెవరో మరలడం తున్నాను? అన్న వషయలనొకనపెటకునొండలదే పరెవలె. అదపేరిలనొపరమడలకొనడం తుంది. అదకొకండా చుట్టపకకల ఎలరిటి మనుషులు ఉన్నారననదా పరిలలు గమనరివకవేడం కూడాలగైక వధేరిషులు పరగడశకొకరణం అయ్యింది. ఈ పరసిథతులలో మరల రవలంటపేరిలలో లగైక వధేరిషుల గురిచి అవగణన పరెవలె. గుడటవ, బయడటవ గురిచి వళ్ళుకొవవెవలె. "తలెయినో వ్యయకతులతో వ్యయకతుగత వషయలు షరే చనేకవేదదన. ఎవరైనా ఫణిలే, వడియిలే అడగనామకు చవెవమ"నో పరెవలె, పరిలకు చవెవలె.

- శరషీ రఘవదేర, షీటి అడషనల డసిషీ

Women In Black: What One-And-Half Years Of No Work Means For Female Bouncers In Delhi

Poorvi Gupta

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The growing need for women bouncers to safeguard women thronging restaurants and bars has come to a halt with such places hardly opening due to lockdowns and strict restrictions, following the pandemic. "I am still waiting for my bosses at Hauz Khas Social to call me back to work. They've assured me that they will, but it's been so long that I am losing out on patience now," says Mehrunissa Shaukat Ali, the female bouncer at one of the capital's most popular hangouts.

I first met Mehrunissa in 2015 when I had gone clubbing at the South Delhi pub. Dressed in an all-black outfit, she was stationed in one corner of the bar with hands firmly resting on her waist. She exuded a strict personality ready to ward off unruly drunk patrons from the club. Her confident kohl-rimmed eyes struck me instantly and I asked her for an appointment to interview her for a publication. Since then, the 35-year-old has been featured by almost every prominent media house in the country so far that claims her to be India's first female bouncer. Yet, despite all the fame, she has been jobless since March 22, 2020 when the nationwide lockdown was announced for the first time after the coronavirus pandemic hit India.

Apart from her job at Social, Mehrunissa also took up independent assignments for weddings and providing security to celebrities like Priyanka Chopra, Priety Zinta, Vidya Balan, etc during events. While she was making around Rs 40,000 – 50,000 per month, her independent assignments also dried up due to the pandemic.

She lives with her ageing parents, two sisters and three children of her elder sister in the slums of Khanpur area. Her younger sister Tarannum is now the family's only breadwinner who has taken up an accounting job in a private firm. Mehrunissa's contributions largely depended on the awards she received during the pandemic including an award and an honorarium of Rs 10,000 from the Delhi Commission of Women on International Women's Day this year, among others.

Facing the wrath of the virus

While Mehrunissa is a popular name in the security industry, thousands of women bouncers who joined the industry for its gender-specific benefits are ravaged by the pandemic. The growing need for women bouncers to safeguard women thronging restaurants and bars has come to a halt with such places hardly opening due to lockdowns and strict restrictions.

National-level kabaddi player Pooja Trivedi* worked as a Physical Education teacher in a private school during the day and bouncer at night. But she lost both her jobs during the pandemic. Despite being qualified to work as a sports teacher, she loved her job as a bouncer at a Noida bar. For Pooja, one of the most difficult things has been to adjust to a home-based life as she has been a workaholic all her life. "Since the first lockdown was imposed and I lost all sources of livelihood, my children's education has been impacted the most. I had to remove my daughter from a CBSE-affiliated school in New Delhi and get her admitted to a UP-board school in Noida because the fee is less. My mother, who is an Anganwadi worker, also helped me financially for a few months," she adds. Currently, Pooja is frantically looking for a job, but all her efforts are in vain.

Silver lining of the profession

Women with limited education were increasingly taking up bouncer jobs in the pre-pandemic world because of its high-paying nature. In most cases, women bouncers were paid around Rs 1,500 – Rs 2,000 per shift along with conveyance while their male counterparts made around Rs 800 – Rs 1,200 for the same shift.

This is exactly why Harpreet Kaur – who shifted from Amritsar to Delhi in search of better livelihood prospects – started working as a bouncer around two years ago when her family battled a financial crunch. But her job didn't last long as she ran out of work because of the pandemic.

Thirty-eight-year-old Harpreet Kaur on-duty in a private firm in Noida before the pandemic cost her job. "I was looking for a job in 2019 that would pay me well but didn't require high qualification as I am only a high school graduate. That's when I found that women also work as bouncers and if you are fit, look intimidating and bold then you can be employed as one," says Harpreet, who worked as a bouncer in an Ola office in Noida.

But one of Delhi's coveted security agencies, Denetim Services employs only around 40-45 women bouncers out of a total of 400 bouncers and bodyguards.

Gig economy on a fall

Bouncers are a niche part of the larger gig economy and informal sector with no trade union or community to safeguard their dwindling employment. While the entire security industry is hit due to the pandemic and the economic slump, women have suffered more job losses than men. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data reveals that between March 2020 – April 2020 26.6 percent of the female workforce moved out of the labour force as opposed to 13.4 percent of men. Despite the lockdown being lifted after August, the size of the female labour force continued to be 14 percent lower in December 2020 than in December 2019.

Economist Ritu Dewan sheds light on why women's work in the informal sector particularly in the security industry has gone redundant. She says, "The pubs and restaurants that employ bouncers are all closed due to the lockdown. Additionally, women's footfalls in pubs have also gone down because of the work-from-home scenario and the increase in unpaid work and caregiving work at home. Therefore, pubs that had employed women bouncers earlier to safeguard their female clientele suddenly didn't require them anymore." She adds, "Whenever there is a job competition, the women primarily lose out big time and this is true for women across sectors."

India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFP) has fallen to its historic low of 23.3 percent against 55.9 percent men's participation as per the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) report of 2017-18.

Jayati Ghosh, Economist, and Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, also comments on the fall of women in the informal sector. She says, "Women's participation was already declining in the workforce which is a huge global tendency that whenever there is a shortage of jobs, women get squeezed out. In India, the decline is sharper than in most other countries because our economy has also suffered more. Within the broader general pattern, particular sectors have been adversely affected. Therefore, women bouncers have lost their jobs disproportionately."

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdowns have not only devastated India's economy but also killed the aspirations and opportunities of millions of women who had found agency and authority in a patriarchal society – in terms of their financial independence cutting across class and gender barriers. By putting such a large percentage of women out of work, it has been proved yet again that women suffer disproportionately in times of crisis.

Coronavum Pengalin Velai Ilapum (Corona And Its Ripple Effect On Careers For Women)

Indumathy.G

17 May 2021, Hindu Tamil Thisai

“கடந்த 22 ஆண்டுகளாக உலக அளவில் வறுமை குறைந்திருந்தது. அதன்பின் கரோனா வந்தது. இதன் காரணமாக வேலை இழப்பு, வாழ்வாதாரத்தில் பாதிப்பு ஏற்பட்டுள்ளது. குறிப்பாகப் பெண்களுக்கு. பலவீனமான சமூகப் பாதுகாப்பு அமைப்புகள், ஏழ்மையான பலரைப் பாதுகாப்பற்ற நிலையில் தள்ளியுள்ளன” என்கிறார் ஐ.நா.வின் மூத்த ஆராய்ச்சியாளாரான ஜினெத் அச்கோனா.

21ஆம் நூற்றாண்டுக்கான கரும்புள்ளியாக மாறியுள்ள கரோனா நெருக்கடியால் உழைக்கும் பெண்கள் மீண்டும் வறுமை நிலைக்குக் கீழே தள்ளப்பட்டிருக்கிறார்கள். மூன்று வேளை உணவு பல வீடுகளில் இரண்டு வேளையாக மாறியிருக்கிறது. இதில் பெண்கள் பட்டினியை நோக்கித் தள்ளப்பட்டுள்ளனர். வறுமையும், வேலை நிரந்தரமின்மையும் பெண்களைத் தொடர்ந்து துரத்திக் கொண்டிருக்கிறது. எல்லாவற்றுக்கும் மேலாகத் தொழில் துறையில் அவர்கள் அளித்த பங்கேற்பையும் குறைத்திருக்கிறது.

கடந்த 15 வருடங்களாக இந்தியாவில் பெண் தொழிலாளர்களின் பங்கேற்பு விகிதம் மெல்லக் குறைந்துகொண்டே வருகிறது. இந்தகைய நிலையில் கரோனா என்னும் பெருந்தொற்று பெண்கள் பணிக்குச் செல்வதற்கான வாய்ப்பினையும், சூழலையும் எதிர்மறையாக மாற்றியுள்ளது. கரோனா தொற்றுக்குப் பிறகு உலகம் முழுவதும் 4.7 கோடிக்கும் அதிகமான பெண்கள் வறுமை நிலைக்குத் தள்ளப்பட்டிருக்கிறார்கள் என்கிறது சர்வதேச தொண்டு நிறுவனமான ஆக்ஸ்பாம். இந்நிறுவனம் 5 நாடுகளில் நடத்திய கருத்துக்கணிப்பில் கரோனா காலத்தில் வேலை இழப்பு, சம்பளக்குறைவு, அளவுக்கு அதிகமான வீட்டு வேலை காரணமாக சுமார் 43% பெண்கள் பதற்றம் மற்றும் மன அழுத்தத்திற்குத் தள்ளப்பட்டிருக்கிறார்கள் என்று தெரிவித்துள்ளது.

கரோனாவால் பல நாடுகளில் பொருளாதார வளர்ச்சி பாதிக்கக் குறைந்திருக்கிறது. பாலினப்பாகுபாடு இந்த வேலையிழப்பிலும் முக்கியப் புள்ளியாக அமைந்திருக்கிறது. இந்தப் பெருந்தொற்றுக் காலத்தில் உலகம் முழுவதும் ஆண்களைவிட, பெண்களே அதிகப்படியான வேலையிழப்பைச் சந்தித்திருக்கிறார்கள். இந்தியாவும் அதைத்தான் பிரதிபலித்துள்ளது.

தொடர்ந்து குறையும் இந்தியப் பெண்களின் பங்களிப்பு

கரோனா காலம் மட்டுமல்லாது அதற்கு முந்தைய ஆண்டுகளிலிருந்தே இந்தியாவில் வேலைக்குச் செல்லும் பெண்களின் எண்ணிக்கை குறைந்துகொண்டே வந்திருக்கிறது. 2000ஆம் ஆண்டு இந்தியாவில் பெண் தொழிலாளர்களின் பங்களிப்பு விகிதம் 25.6% ஆக இருந்த நிலையில், இந்த எண்ணிக்கை அடுத்த 19 ஆண்டுகளில் அதாவது 2019ஆம் ஆண்டில் 20.3% ஆகக் குறைந்துவிட்டதாக சர்வதேச தொழிலாளர் அமைப்பு சம்பந்தத்தில் வெளியிட்ட புள்ளிவிவரத்தில் குறிப்பிட்டுள்ளது. ஊரடங்கு காலகட்டத்தில் பொருளாதார ரீதியாகப் பெரும் இழப்பைச் சந்திக்கும் குறு, சிறு நிறுவனங்கள் பல, தங்களது நிறுவனங்களை மூடும் நிலைக்குத் தள்ளப்படுவதால் ஆட்குறைப்பு மற்றும் சம்பளக் குறைப்பு நடவடிக்கைகளில் ஈடுபடுகின்றன. ஆட்குறைப்பு நடவடிக்கைகளில் ஒரு நிறுவனத்தில் 5 பேர் நீக்கப்படுகிறார்கள் என்றால் அவர்களில் 3 பேர் பெண் தொழிலாளர்களாக இருக்கிறார்கள். நிறுவனங்களில் ஆண்களுக்கு நிகரான எண்ணிக்கையில் பெண்கள் பணியமர்த்தப்படாத சூழலில், கரோனாவைக் காரணம் காட்டி பெண்கள் தொடர்ந்து பணியிலிருந்து நீக்கப்பட்டு வருகிறார்கள். மேலும், ஊதிய உயர்வுக்குக் காத்திருந்த பெண்களுக்கு இந்த கரோனா காலம் அதனை மறக்கடிக்கச் செய்துள்ளது. தங்களின் சம்பள உயர்வை எதிர்பார்க்காமல் வேலையைத் தக்கவைத்துக் கொள்ளுங்கள் என்று நிறுவனங்கள் சொல்லாமல் சொல்லி

வருகின்றன. ஊரடங்கு காலகட்டங்களில் பெண்கள் வேலையிழப்பு குறித்து அசிம் பிரேம்ஜி பல்கலைக்கழகம் ஆய்வு ஒன்றை நடத்தியிருக்கிறது. அதில் 19 சதவீதப் பெண்களுக்கு வேலையே கிடைக்கவில்லை என்றும், 40%க்கும் அதிகமானவர்கள் நிரந்தர வேலையை இழந்திருக்கிறார்கள் என்றும் தெரிவிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. மேலும், ஆண்களுடன் ஒப்பிடும்போது, ஊரடங்கில் ஏழு மடங்குக்கு அதிகமாக பெண்கள் வேலை இழப்பைச் சந்திக்கிறார்கள். பல பெண்கள் மீண்டும் வேலைக்குத் திரும்பாத சூழலும் உருவாகியுள்ளதாக அந்த ஆய்வு கூறுகிறது. அதுமட்டுமல்லாது கடந்த ஆண்டில் கரோனாவைக் கட்டுப்படுத்த மத்திய அரசு விதித்த ஊரடங்கால் தொழில் துறையில் பெண்களின் பங்களிப்பு பெருமளவு குறைந்துவிட்டது என்றும், இதன் காரணமாகத் தொழிலாளர் பங்கேற்பு விகிதத்தில் ஆண்களுக்கும் பெண்களுக்கும் இடையே பெரும் இடைவெளி ஏற்பட்டிருக்கிறது என்றும் இந்திய பொருளாதாரக் கண்காணிப்பு மையத்தின் ஆய்வறிக்கை கூறுகிறது.

கைவிடப்பட்ட அமைப்பு சாரா பெண்கள்

மிகவும் நெருக்கடியான இக்காலகட்டத்தில் அமைப்பு சாரா பெண்களின் நிலையைக் குறிப்பிடாமல் கடந்துவிட முடியாது. எத்தனை மணி நேரம் உழைத்தாலும் வேலைக்குச் சேரும்போது நிர்ணயிக்கப்பட்ட அதே சம்பளத்தையே பல வருடங்களாக அப்பெண்கள் பெற்றுக் கொண்டிருக்கிறார்கள். இந்தச் சூழலில் இந்த கரோனா காலத்தில் அமைப்பு சாரா தொழில்களில் பணிபுரியும் பெண்கள் பலர் தங்களது பணிகளை இழந்திருக்கிறார்கள்.

வீட்டு வேலை, பீடித் தொழில், பின்னலாடை நிறுவனங்கள், தேயிலைத் தோட்டப் பெண்கள், கட்டிடத் தொழிலாளர்கள், துப்புரவுத் தொழிலாளர்கள், விவசாயக் கூலிகள் எனப் பல துறைகளில் பெண்கள் வேலை இழப்பைச் சந்தித்திருக்கிறார்கள்.

“சில மாதங்களுக்கு முன்னர்தான் புற்றுநோயால் எனது கணவரை இழந்தேன். கணவரின் மரணத்திற்குப் பிறகு குடும்பத்தின் ஒட்டுமொத்த பாரமும் என் மீது விழுந்துள்ளது. மூளை வளர்ச்சி பாதிக்கப்பட்ட எனது இரண்டு குழந்தைகளையும் நான்தான் பார்த்துக் கொள்கிறேன். இந்த ஊரடங்கு காலம் எனக்குப் பெரும் துயரத்தை ஏற்படுத்தி இருக்கிறது. தொற்று அச்சம் காரணமாக நிறைய இடங்களில் வீட்டு வேலைக்குச் செல்ல முடிவதில்லை. தற்போது இரண்டு வீடுகளில் வீட்டு வேலை செய்து வருகிறேன். எனினும் அந்த வருமானம் எனது குடும்பத்தைக் கவனிக்கவும், வீட்டு வாடகை கொடுக்கவும் போதுமானதாக இல்லை” என்று சென்னை பெரம்பூரில் வசிக்கும் தேவி தன் கையறு நிலையை வெளிப்படுத்தினார்.

தேவி மட்டுமல்ல, அமைப்பு சாரா வேலைகளில் ஈடுபடும் பெரும்பாலான பெண்கள் இந்த ஊரடங்கு காலகட்டங்களில் கைவிடப்பட்டிருக்கிறார்கள்.

பெண்களுக்கான அரசியல் அதிகாரம் குறித்து தொடர்ந்து வலியுறுத்தும் சக்தி அமைப்பின் துணை நிறுவனத் தாராகிருஷ்ணசாமி கூறும்போது, “நெருக்கடி காலங்களைப் பொறுத்தவரை அடித்தட்டில் இருக்கும் மக்களின் வேலைகள்தான் முதலில் பறிக்கப்படும். உதாரணத்துக்கு வீட்டு வேலை செய்பவர்கள், கட்டிடத் தொழிலாளர்களை எடுத்துக்கொள்ளுங்கள். இரண்டாம் உலகப் போரின் போது ஆண்கள் போரில் ஈடுபட்டபோது பெண்கள் எல்லாம் தொழிற்சாலைகளில் வேலை பார்த்துக் கொண்டிருந்தார்கள். போர் முடிந்து திரும்பியதும் அந்த வேலையை ஆண்கள் எடுத்துக் கொண்டார்கள்.

பெண்களைப் பொறுத்தவரை அவர்களில் பெரும்பாலானவர்கள் அமைப்பு சாரா தொழிலாளர்களாகத்தான் உள்ளனர். அமைப்பு சாரா தொழில்களில் பணிபுரியும் பெண்களுக்குக் குறைந்த அளவு சம்பளமே அளிக்கப்படுகிறது. பணி நீக்கம் என்று வரும்போது முதலில் இப்பெண்கள்தான் வேலை இழக்கிறார்கள். ஏனென்றால் பெண்கள் என்றால் வீட்டு வேலைகளைக் கவனிப்பதுதான் முதல் கடமை என இந்தச் சமூகம் கட்டமைத்துள்ளது. இந்தக் காரணத்தால்தான் படித்த பெண்களும் அமைப்பு சாரா தொழில்களில் தங்களை ஈடுபடுத்திக்

கொள்கிறார்கள். பாதி நேரம் குடும்பத்தைப் பார்த்துக் கொண்டு மீதி நேரம் துணி தைக்கும் பணியைச் செய்து கொள்ளலாம் என்று நினைக்கிறார்கள். குடும்பத்திற்கு முன்னுரிமை அளிக்கும் பொருட்டே அமைப்பு சாரா தொழில்களில் பெண்கள் ஈடுபடுகிறார்கள்.

இவ்வாறு இருக்க, அமைப்பு சாரா தொழில்களின் நலனில் நாம் திருத்தத்தைக் கொண்டு வரவேண்டும். இப்பெண்கள் அனைவரும் அமைப்பு சார்ந்த தொழில்களின் கீழ் கொண்டு வரப்பட வேண்டும். அவ்வாறு செய்தால் உள்நாட்டு வளர்ச்சி, தனி நபர் வருமானம் என அனைத்தும் அதிகரிக்கும்.

பகுதி நேரம் வேலை செய்தாலும் மருத்துவக் காப்பீட்டுத் திட்டங்களை அவர்களுக்குக் கொண்டு வரவேண்டும். ஒரு நிறுவனத்தில் 100 பெண்கள் பணிபுரிந்தால் அவர்களது சிறு குழந்தைகளுக்கான பாராமரிப்பு மையங்களை ஏற்படுத்தித் தர வேண்டும். பெண்களைப் பள்ளிக்கூடம் அனுப்புவதற்கு எம்மாதிரியான சலுகைகள் தருகிறார்களோ அவ்வாறே அமைப்பு சார் நிறுவனங்களில் பணிபுரியும் பெண்களுக்கும் சலுகைகள் வழங்க வேண்டும். அவ்வாறு வழங்கினால் படித்த பெண்கள் நல்ல சம்பளத்ததுடன் பணி சார்ந்த பாதுகாப்பையும் பெறுவார்கள். இவை எல்லாம் அரசின் கையில்தான் உள்ளது. தமிழகத்தில் 70 சதவீதத்துக்கும் அதிகமான படித்த பெண்கள் இருக்கும்போது 30 சதவீதம்தான் அமைப்பு சார்ந்த நிறுவனங்களில் இருக்கிறார்களா என்ற கேள்வி எழ வேண்டும். பெண்களின் தலையெழுத்து மாற வேண்டும் என்றால், அவர்களை அமைப்பு சார் நிறுவனங்களில் இணைக்கவேண்டும். அதற்கான திட்டங்களை அரசுதான் நடைமுறைப்படுத்த வேண்டும்” என்கிறார் தாரா கிருஷ்ணசாமி.

என்ன தேவை?

கடந்த 20 ஆண்டுகளில் பெண் தொழிலாளர்கள் பங்களிப்பு தொடர்ந்து குறைந்து வருவதற்கான காரணங்களை வெறும் புள்ளிவிவரங்களாகக் கடக்காமல் அதன் பின்னணியில் உள்ள உளவியல் சிக்கல்களைக் களம் கண்டு தீர்க்க வேண்டும். குடும்பமா? வேலையா? என்ற குழப்பத்தில் சிக்கியுள்ள இளம் பெண்களுக்குத் தெளிவான பாதையைக் காட்டும் பொறுப்பும், அவசியமும் அரசுக்கு உள்ளது.

அமைப்பு சாரா பெண்களைப் பொறுத்தவரை நீண்ட காலமாக அவர்களது தேவைகளாக ஒலிக்கும் மருத்துவக் காப்பீடு, பட்ஜெட்டில் நிதி ஒதுக்குதல், ஓய்வூதியம் போன்றவற்றுக்கு அரசு செவிமடுக்க வேண்டும். அவர்களது உழைப்புக்கான அங்கீகாரம் அளிக்கப்பட வேண்டும்.

பெண்களுக்கான சம உரிமை, சம வாய்ப்பு, சம ஊதியம் என்பதை வெறும் வார்த்தைகளாக இல்லாமல் அதைச் சாத்தியமாக்குவதற்கான முயற்சியில் மகளிர் நல வாரியங்கள் செயலபட வேண்டும். அதற்கு நாட்டிலுள்ள பெண் அமைப்புகள் எல்லாம் பிரிந்து கிடக்காமல் ஒரே குடையின் கீழ் சேர வேண்டும்.

மேலும், அதிகாரத்துக்கு அஞ்சாமல், பணியிடங்களில் பெண்களுக்கு நடக்கும் பாலியல் அத்துமீறல்களுக்கு உடனடி நடவடிக்கைகள் எடுக்க வேண்டும்.

பெண் தொழிலாளர்களின் பங்களிப்பு சம அளவில் இருந்தால் ஒரு நாட்டின் பொருளாதாரம் உச்சத்தை அடைய முடியும். இதற்குத் தடையாக இருக்கும் பழமைவாதங்கள் அகற்றப்பட வேண்டும். சமூக மாற்றங்கள் நாடு முழுவதும் நிகழ வேண்டும்.

கரோனாவால் பொருளாதார ரீதியாக, உளவியல் ரீதியாகவும் பெரும் பின்னடைவை பெண்கள் எதிர்கொண்டு இருக்கிறார்கள். பல பெண்கள் மீண்டும் வீடுகளுக்குள் அடைபட்டுக் கொண்டிருக்கும் சூழலை கரோனா ஏற்படுத்தியுள்ளது. நகர்தலில்தான் பெண்களின் முன்னேற்றம் உள்ளது. இருண்ட, நீண்ட சுரங்கத்தின் முடிவில் உள்ள வெளிச்சம்போல, நிச்சயம் இந்தக் காலத்தையும் கடக்க வேண்டும்.

Aa Thozhilali Sthreekal Engineyinnu Jeevikkunnu? (How Do Those Women Workers Live Now?)

Shafeeq Thamarassery

25 August 2021, Dool News

This is the tale of a group of people who couldn't earn anything other than diseases and hardships despite working hard for decades. Women workers leave their houses and reach their workspaces every day, to work for meagre wages and suffer the exploitation only to take care of their families. However, since cities and commercial establishments have shut down due to the pandemic induced lockdown, tens of thousands of women workers are now pushed into the darkness of uncertainty.

Four years ago, Ambika, a sewing worker from Westhill, Kozhikode, Kerala, was diagnosed with cataracts. As a result, she could no longer work as efficiently as earlier. Ambika, who could stitch three or four sets of clothes every day, struggled to finish one garment even after working hard all day. As a result, her wages were reduced to a few hundred rupees. After travel and tea expenses, she could take home only sixty or seventy rupees a day. Even then, she continued her work to earn a living in her later years.

66-year-old Ambika and her sister, 79-year-old Girija, live together in a rented house in Westhill. Girija used to work earlier like her sister but is resting at home now as she has fallen ill. The sisters are not married, neither do they have a home of their own. Their parents had passed away ages ago. They lived with their brother, who succumbed to a heart attack a few years back. Now, they lead a solitary life without anyone else to look forward to.

They need to meet the expenses of their day-to-day life, including house rent, electricity and water bills, food and medicine. Yet, despite all the oddities, they managed to survive with the amount Ambika could earn from her job. The sisters fought hard with their circumstances; they kept their expenses at the lowest by cutting short on food and even ignoring the torments of diseases.

After the pandemic, cities shut down, and Ambika lost her job unexpectedly. They lost their only source of income, and the sisters didn't have anything else to look up to. They now live on the disaster relief kits provided by the government and social workers. Unable to pay their rent, these older women have no other way left than to walk out to the streets if the house owner asks them to.

Ambika and Girija represent the thousands of women workers who work in the unorganised sector in Kerala. They are a group of people who couldn't earn anything other than diseases and hardships despite working hard for decades. Women workers leave their houses and reach their workspaces every day, work for meagre wages after surviving exploitation, and take care of their families. However, since the cities and commercial establishments shut down due to the pandemic and lockdown, tens of thousands of women workers have been pushed into the darkness of uncertainty.

What is the unorganised labour sector?

The unorganised sector is the labour sector which doesn't fall under the rules, laws and restrictions imposed by the government regarding work atmosphere, wage conditions, incentives, and labour rights. The unorganised labour sector plays a crucial role in increasing the country's employment opportunities, yet jobs under this sector are severely underpaid. In addition to this, labourers in the unorganised sector are denied paid leaves, welfare packages, predefined working time, holidays, and medical incentives accessible to all other labour sectors.

All the laws and restrictions related to employment are left to the employer's discretion because of which any labourer can be kicked out of the job at any time. Workers of the

unorganised sector mostly come from socially and economically backward classes. According to the latest data released by the International Labour Organisation, 80% of the Indian economic system falls into the unorganised sector.

Women representation in the organised-unorganised sectors

As per the Economic Survey of India 2012, 79.53% of the employees of the organised sector in India are men. On the other hand, the organised sector, which includes both public and private sectors, employs only 20.47% of women. In the organised sector, only one-fourth of the workers are women compared to men. On the contrary, the representation of women workers in the unorganised sector is greater than that of the organised sector. Many surveys and studies have been conducted regarding the employment and employees in the unorganised sector, but no accurate data is available.

The majority of the women workers in India work in the unorganised sector. According to the statistics published by the Periodic Labour Force Survey in 2017-18, out of the 105 million women workers in India, 96 million are in the unorganised sector. A study conducted by Krea University in February 2021 observes that the unorganised sector employs more women due to the Indian social circumstances that dictate an unwritten law of lower payment to women.

Unorganised labourers and Covid 19 outbreak

Asma, from Palazhi in Kozhikode, is a laundry worker who started working at 22. Asma works at the Muthalakkulam ground. Asma's job is to collect soiled linen from hotels, beauty parlours, lodges, police quarters, flats and apartments, wash and dry it, and then press it neatly before returning them. She receives an average of three or four rupees for each cloth. However, if it is a bedsheet, the fee goes as high as eight rupees.

Asma reaches the laundry workers' station at Muthalakkulam early in the morning. After which, she collects clothes from various points in the city. She then comes back to the ground, washes them one by one and hangs them dry. After the clothes are dried, she irons them, folds them, and returns them to the centre.

Her work lasts an entire day. After finishing this tiring job demanding physical effort, Asma gets paid two hundred rupees each day. Out of this, she has to set aside the expenses for washing soap, washing soda and charcoal for the iron box. Deducting all these costs, Asma has around Rs.130-140 left in her hand. When she decides to have tea or take an auto-rickshaw ride back home, this income decreases further. Asma can save only around a hundred rupees most days, even after toiling hard from morning to evening. Yet, despite her health issues, she keeps coming to work just because she wishes to lead a self-sufficient life without burdening others.

Asma has been doing the same job for the last thirty years. She is separated from her husband, lives alone and has no other source of income. Covid 19 pandemic and lockdown hit her hard unexpectedly. Asma couldn't leave her house and come out to work. She started struggling to meet her necessities and pay her bills. Asma had to live with many health issues like knee pain with insufficient money to buy medicines. Asma asserts that she did not die of hunger, only because she received rice and provisions through the public distribution system.

"I am 52 years old. I don't think any miracles are going to happen in my life anymore. I'll just live and then die like this. Yet, I wish not to depend on others for a living. Now, I am not able to go out and work even though I am more than willing to. I just want these circumstances to end. I hope I can get back to work like I did in this city again", says Asma.

"I could survive because I live alone. But there are many families here who solely rely on laundry work to earn a living. Families depending on the work at the laundry station. They are struggling really hard now. Even though lockdown restrictions have been lifted, people are not visiting hotels and lodges like they did before. So, there are no clothes to wash. No

one is willing to inquire about the laundry worker families. There are school-going children in these families. Nobody wants to know how they live”, she adds.

Most women workers in the Kozhikode district worked in SM Street. However, many of them lost their jobs after shops closed due to the lockdown restrictions. Even though the shops will work once the restrictions are lifted, they no longer need salespeople. As a result, businesses face a downfall and customers are very few. Raji from Elathur, who used to work as a saleswoman in a private textile shop, reveals that almost half of the women workers of the textile shops in and around SM Street have lost their job.

“My husband was a lorry driver. Once he met with an accident in Tamil Nadu, and got severely injured. He couldn’t go back to work after that. We have two children who study in LP School. I started going to work so that my family doesn’t go hungry. Lockdown was quite unexpected. While staying back at home, I was praying for the lockdown to end as soon as possible. Finally, the government declared that shops can be opened from the next day. I was indeed excited to go back to work. But my employers informed me that they did not want me to come back. I was shocked. All these days, we lived on borrowed money from many people which I had promised to pay back once the shops opened. I honestly don’t know what to do now. I went out and started searching for jobs but no one is willing to employ me. I can’t even blame them. Customers are not visiting the shops due to financial constraints after the pandemic. They cannot pay the employees without any business happening”, says Raji.

Trade Union worker Sakkeena, a sewing worker in SM Street, has another story to tell. She observes that the discriminations evident in the workspace earlier have gotten more severe during these days.

“Ever since the business sector has been facing a crisis due to the pandemic, labourers are able to work only half a week. It is quite unfortunate that the women have to face discrimination even amidst all this. Male workers get to work 4 days a week, whereas female workers receive only one or two days of work a week. It is better to kick them out of their jobs”, says Sakkeena.

Trade Union activist P Viji, the founder of Asanghaditha Meghala Thozhilali Union, points out that all the women workers across Kerala face a severe post-pandemic crisis. “Women workers have been pushed into a severe financial crisis. Many of these labourers have borrowed money from banks and private financial institutions to meet different needs such as house construction, children’s education, the marriage of girl children and treatments. They used to repay these loans by setting aside a fixed amount every day from their wages. However, such families face a standstill as their income has stopped suddenly. Most of them live in fear of losing their shelter.”

It is pretty evident that women directly bear all the family burdens. Many women struggle hard to handle all these problems and succumb to depression. However, the government is still hesitant to implement any packages to protect the women workers of the unorganised sector. In that case, they will be answerable to any consequence that may erupt in the future”, says P Viji.

According to Sonia George, social worker and Secretary of Seva Union, the Covid 19 period has proved the heights of insecurities women workers face in the unorganised sector. “Only those employees who have a permanent job and other government incentives, that is, the workers of the organised sector with job security, have security over their lives. Government announces festival incentives and bonuses for them during the special seasons of Onam, Vishu and Christmas. On the other hand, unorganised labourers with no job and no income have no such benefits.

All the existing economic and labour structures are so narrow that they fail to accommodate the majority of the labourers and their basic needs. The consequences of the Covid 19

pandemic have proved that we do not have any system in place to safeguard the workers of the unorganised sector, who is, in fact, a majority in India, and to consider their needs. It is evident that none of our existing policies or judicial structure incorporates unorganised workers. However, in these circumstances where our organised sector is diminishing, the unorganised sector has been pivotal in nourishing the economic stability of our country. Hence, governments have to consider the contributions of these labourers and device measures for their sustainable development”, says Sonia George.

Solutions:

Following are the immediate solutions put forward by the women workers of the unorganised sector before the government.

- 1) Labourers of the unorganised sector who have lost their jobs should be compensated for the lost wages.
- 2) Domestic workers, fish sellers, street vendors, employees of small shops, hotel workers etc., should be added to the vaccine priority list.
- 3) The government should develop employment opportunities locally. In addition, they should devise long term plans aimed at the survival of the unorganised sector.
- 4) Banks/institutions should introduce a moratorium to Kudumbasree and Microfinance loans. Along with this, they should reduce interests during the lockdown
- 5) The government should develop Social security systems for unorganised sector workers. For example, it should include pandemic and natural calamity insurances, compensation of wages and other support systems.
- 6) Proper arrangements should be made for women in the fishing sector, the primary right to sell fish. In addition, they should provide special facilities to sell fish during the pandemic.
- 7) Raw materials should be made available in traditional sectors, including reed, handloom and clay pottery, and they should adopt immediate measures to restart production.
- 8) Employment plans should be devised in tribal areas to provide permanent jobs and income.
- 9) Mahatma Gandhi rural employment guarantee mission and Ayyankali urban employment guarantee mission should be restarted immediately by ensuring social distancing.
- 10) Opportunities to attend online tuitions at local anganwadis and libraries should be ensured to children.
- 11) Financial aid should be announced for children who have lost one or both parents to COVID - 19.

(Translated from Malayalam to English)

Veettujoli Cheythurunna Aa Thozhilali Sthreekal Evide Poyi? (What Happened To Those Domestic Help Workers Who Used To Work At Your Homes?)

Shafeeq Thamarassery

30 August 2021, Dool News

Spending the lion's share of their lives toiling in others' houses, earning nothing but loans and backaches, there are 10000s of domestic workers across Kerala whose life has come to a halt.

Prabha, a native of Vattiyoorkavu, Thiruvananthapuram, was eight months pregnant when her husband left her 14 years ago. With no means of livelihood and an ageing mother to tend to, Prabha went in search of a job while her baby was just six months old. She scoured through jobs in nearby shops and houses, landed on a few temporary jobs, and earned her livelihood working as a sanitation worker and sometimes as domestic help. She took care of her ailing mother and son with her meagre earnings. Finally, she took a loan and built a house.

Now, Prabha's son is a 9th grader. Her son's education, Prabha's mother's treatment, loan repayments, and other household bills relied on her meagre income. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, Prabha used to work on a farm in Mundela near Nedumangad. The nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of Covid-19 was unexpected, and it left her unemployed. In addition, the pandemic made it difficult to even step out of the house. Prabha struggled to make ends meet, their family survived on ration, but everything else, including loan repayments, came to a halt.

When the lockdown was lifted after the first wave of Covid-19, Prabha's attempt to find a new job became fruitless because people were reluctant to hire domestic workers. The second pandemic wave resulted in the second lockdown, with stricter restrictions, taking a heavier toll on her life.

Praba had fought all life challenges thrown at her for the last 14 years through hard work and perseverance. However, her story is not an isolated one. It is the story of thousands of domestic workers across Kerala who have lost their job owing to the pandemic.

Domestic workers in India were the first to lose their livelihood when Covid-19 cases sprouted in India. However, the social distancing protocols initiated as a defence mechanism against the pandemic restricted their mobility. In addition, the fear of the disease made people reluctant to hire domestic workers, resulting in widespread unemployment.

Most of these women have spent years offering their services to other families cooking, cleaning, washing, and helping them raise their children. Yet, when these workers were laid off, no one cared about their well-being or survival.

The majority of the domestic workers in Kerala hail from the outskirts of the cities or small villages, and they move to towns and cities for employment. These workers play an imperative role in Kerala's social system, yet they remain invisible in government records and documents. There have been no significant studies regarding the role played by thousands of these workers in Kerala's economy. The unorganised nature of their labour makes them even more vulnerable and pushes them to the margins of our social system.

International Labour Organization's (ILO) estimates almost 40 lakh domestic workers in India. A majority of these workers are women. Often, they do not have fixed working hours, and their labour is exploited. In addition, the lack of legal protection and the unorganised nature of their work adds to their vulnerability, and their voices remain unheard.

The government and civil society organisations have paid little attention to the well being of domestic workers and their families. Loss of their jobs made every day a struggle for survival for these workers. Many of these workers were dependent on government-supported food distribution systems and food kits from some Non- Government Organizations (NGOs) for survival. These were often the only means that kept them out of hunger.

Labour unions in India have demanded compensation of ₹7500 from the government for the labourers who lost their jobs due to Covid-19, but their plea seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

Sulekha Khader, a native of Vaipin, Ernakulam, was 21 years old when she began to work as a housemaid 30 years ago. The responsibility of the entire household fell on her shoulders when her husband became severely ill. In her three-decade-long service, Sulekha has served as a maid to several families across the city. Before the pandemic, she used to work as a maid for a doctor's family in Manjummel, Ernakulam. With the onset of the pandemic in Kerala, she lost her job. With loans to repay and no means of income, Sulekha struggled to keep her family afloat. The conditions worsened further when her entire family was covid positive. Sulekha and her family had to depend on others to make ends meet.

"When the first lockdown was lifted, I went in search of jobs at houses where I had worked before but in fear of Covid, everyone was trying to avoid hiring housemaids. Wealthier families prefer live-in maids. Many families who used to hire housemaids fear that they might get infected if they hire maids who commute back home every day after work. Many domestic maids I know are in the same situation, struggling to find jobs. There are many among them who fear that banks would seize their houses after failed loan repayments. I am also in the same situation. I don't know what to do when someone calls me from the bank asking for loan repayment," says Sulekha.

The economy is facing severe setbacks due to Covid-19; its impact has been evident on small-scale businesses struggling to stay afloat. Owing to this, many middle-class households have stopped hiring housemaids as a means to cut down on expenses. This adds to the crisis faced by domestic maids.

Most maids who opt for this job are from poor financial backgrounds. They often have limited facilities at home, which do not allow them to follow social distancing protocols if their family members get infected with Covid-19. Hence the spread of the disease happens quickly. The rate of infection and deaths due to Covid-19 is high among domestic workers, but they receive no consideration or protection (from the government and their employers)

"Earlier I used to work for many people but now most of them are not hiring housemaids. Due to lockdown malls and small businesses had remained closed for a long time, most of their households have stopped hiring housemaids to cut down expenses. Most of the workers who lost their jobs had been working for the same family for a long time, but in a day's time, they were laid off without any warning. Had it been any other work sector their employers would have offered compensation or financial support of some kind. This doesn't happen in our case, there are no guarantees or security for our wages and jobs. People can fire us at any time," adds Sulekha.

Suhara, a native of Ernakulam, had a similar story to share. She worked as a maid for a family for eleven years, but she was laid off right before imposed lockdown. For weeks she was left unemployed, but her employer did not seem to care how she survived during those testing times.

In the absence of other job opportunities, once the lockdown was lifted, she was forced to take up her old job with the family, which fired her without any prior notice or compensation. Within a few months, the second wave of Covid-19 hit, and this time Suhara's entire family, including her, were infected. Again, they had to depend on the government and other food

kits to survive. Although, Suhara says that she faced the true face of poverty during those times, even during this period of struggle, her employer offered no support.

When private spaces become workplaces

The Indian labour laws do not recognise 'house' as a workplace; hence when 'others' house' a private space becomes the workplace of these workers, it deprives them of their rights as workers. The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008 was the first Indian law to recognise the rights of domestic workers. However, this act was repealed as a part of the present labour law reforms. The Code on Social Security, 2020, which replaces Social Security Act, 2008, excludes domestic workers from its provision.

To improve domestic workers' working and living conditions, in June 2011, ILO adopted the Convention 189 and the Recommendation 201 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. This was the culmination of an organised effort taken by domestic workers worldwide for over ten years, the result of relentless struggle, propaganda and lobbying for their recognition, visibility and rights. It took over two years of continuous discussions to make Convention 189 a reality. Initially, countries including India did not agree with the provisions of the conventions. However, most nations voted to favour organisations representing domestic workers in the second year.

It has been ten years since Convention 189 got adopted. Between 2012 and 2021, 31 countries have put the codes of the convention into action. Although in 2009, India had initiated a National Task Force on Domestic Workers, many draft policies were formulated to ensure decent work for them; despite these being submitted to the cabinet for review, none of them has been implemented till now.

Inconsiderate Politicians and Domestic Workers

Even though domestic workers constitute one of India's most significant labour forces, this sector does not receive social and legal protection. In addition, the unorganised nature of their work and the fact that their workplaces are 'homes' which are private spaces contribute to the challenge of organising them.

Mainstream political organisations have made no efforts to organise these workers due to their lack of acknowledgement as vote banks. However, SEVA (Self Employed Women's Association), which works for the welfare of women employed in the unorganised sector, is one of the few organisations for domestic workers.

Sonia George, secretary of SEVA Kerala, remarks that domestic workers' impoverished conditions root in the governments' discriminatory attitudes towards women workers in unorganised sectors.

"Regardless of being a vital part of India's labour force, we witness that domestic workers are neglected by all means. In addition to being overlooked in the labour laws, no constructive efforts were made to include them in the social security systems.

"When the government ensures the protection of the organised sectors even at the expense of incurring debts and other ways and means; the unorganised sectors are left unprotected even when they are struggling to survive. Governments take no actions for their revival. The responsibilities of the employers have not been reflected anywhere.

National labour unions had petitioned the Prime Minister of India requesting compensation of ₹ 7500 each for workers who had lost their jobs during the first wave of Covid-19, but in vain by the National Disaster Management laws. The second wave had severe implications in the life of domestic workers, as they were left unemployed. Even when there were provisions for domestic workers to travel for work with a pass, the lack of public transportation facilities and rapid spread of Covid hindered their potential chances of availing jobs," explains Sonia George.

Spending the lion's share of their lives toiling in others' houses, earning nothing but loans and backaches, there are 10000s of domestic workers across Kerala whose livelihood has come to a halt. Women workers collectively demand that the government provide some relief package to the workers in unorganised sectors.

(Translated from Malayalam to English)

Jeevan Panayam Vechu Joli Cheythittum Avaganana Mathram (Ignorance Is The Only Reward Even After Putting Life At Stake For Work)

Shafeeq Thamarassery

18 September 2021, Dool News

'The beauty that you see in this city today is a contribution of my labour too. And yet I do not have a land of my own or a roof over my head. Tomorrow, if I am unable to work, I have no idea how I will survive. Despite working in this garbage and dirt for decades, I am penniless to consult a doctor and buy some medicines if I have fallen ill.'

Vanaja is a clean-up worker at Haritha Karmasena under Calicut Corporation. Her normal day starts at 4 am busy preparing breakfast and lunch for her husband and kids. Later she also has to catch a bus to her workplace which is 8 km from her home. The work starts at 6.30 am. Along with the unit members, waste and garbage are collected from the vicinity and separated as organic and plastic. Finally, the work comes to an end when the collected garbage is taken to the processing plant. Back home by 2 pm. Till late night she is preoccupied with household chores. When all the shops got closed during the lockdown, her husband who was a salesman lost his job and has always been at home since then. There are also two school-going kids. Their clothes need to be washed, the house has to be cleaned, cook meals and also take care of the needs of the husband and kids. Moreover, she is victim to her husband's rebukes and taunts for coming home late after work. Not a single day she gets to retire early. Ever since the husband lost his job Vanaja has been the only breadwinner. Half of the 10k salary goes for the house rent. The rest half is used to meet the other needs of the 4-member family. Vanaja says that she is left with no choice other than to take up this risky job at this time of the pandemic. Let alone Calicut, clean-up workers all over Kerala lead similar lives. Since they have no other means to earn a living, they are destined to pick rags.

Society disrespectfully calls them 'perukikal' or rag pickers, with little money that they earn, they are destined to look after their families and also learn to resist the diseases rewarded by their job. Most of their stories are tales of ignorance, burden and illness even after toiling for so many years. The clean-up workers collectively criticize the government that they are not even considered or provided any amenities while working in the most perilous situations during this time of pandemic.

It was at the age of 24, MINI became a clean-up worker at Kaloor road, Calicut. She worked for 15 years. In 2014, when she went for a check-up due to some health issues, she realized she was diagnosed with cancer. Though she started the medication at Trivandrum Regional Cancer Centre, there reached a point where she was made to meet both her household and treatment expenses. She did not receive any help either from the corporation or the authorities. Since she was an employee of a non-organizational sector, she did not have any sort of insurance or other concessions. Mini says that her co-workers help her with their meagre amounts.

'For years I had collected garbage from various hotels and apartments of this city. Stale garbage infested with worms were collected regularly. The trash from houses included napkins and even used condoms along with other debris.

People hardly obey when asked not to mix plastic material along with other trash. And we separate them using our own hands. Often, we feel nauseated. We are unable to even eat after working in this rotten garbage. We also get skin diseases and other infections. At times we have a high fever. Still, we get back to work. After all, ours is not just a job or duty, it is more of a social service. If we fail to work for a day, the whole place is filled with garbage. The development that you witness in this city today is the result of years of our toil and hard work. Our life comes to a dead-end if we fall sick even after enduring all these difficulties.

This is our situation. This is also my experience. When I was diagnosed with cancer, no one supported me except my co-workers.' Said Mini.

Kerala's Garbage disposal system

Kerala's waste management is primarily the responsibility of Local Self Governing Bodies. Therefore, the garbage disposal system works at the Corporation, Municipality and Gram Panchayat levels. Household waste contributes to more than 50 percent of Kerala's garbage. The collected garbage is segregated as organic waste and inorganic waste. This whole process takes place under Haritha Kerala Mission, Suchitwa Mission, Kudumbasree, Thozhilurappu Mission and Green Kerala Company. And hence a majority of Kerala's clean-up workers are women. 80 percent of them are Kudumbasree members. With the support of the Local Self Governing Bodies, Kudumbasree Mission Haritha Karmasena was formed and thereby the labourers were provided with the training.

However, studies show that the unscientific and unhygienic method of collection, separation and disposal of waste are causing physical difficulties to the labourers. Today in Kerala, there are more than 27000 Haritha Karmasena members who are Kudumbasree members. The amount of money amassed by the Haritha Karmasena from the houses and institutions where the garbage is collected, the unit members divide it equally among themselves. From this, the labourers receive an amount of Rs 4000 to 6000 only. Besides, taking the collected plastic waste to the recycling unit helps them to earn an average of Rs 10000.

Earlier, the clean-up workers used to be men. Back then, there were special vehicles by the Local Self Governing Bodies to take away the waste and garbage. Waste was mainly collected from the roadsides, junctions and shops. The accumulation of organic and inorganic waste in the household became a serious issue. And hence sanitation duties were formed under various missions. The one formed by Haritha Karmasena became conclusive. Collecting garbage from houses, flats and other institutions once a week, solid waste on alternative days is the waste management method followed by Haritha Karmasena. However, the removal of organic waste also became the need of the hour. Accordingly, they began collecting waste from houses and flats around 7 am in auto pickup vans.

Zoya Thomas, who has been working for various gender developmental activities including Kudumbasree for the past 20 years' remarks that comparatively, people from the lower strata of the society and people with poor financial backgrounds approach waste disposal jobs. "Though collecting waste does not belong to the 'societal status', this work also falls under the gender discrimination in jobs. By taking up these jobs, they aim to prove that they are capable of doing all sorts of work. Women working in this sector are socially, financially and ethnically backwards. These women encounter stench and filthy situations".

The spread of Covid and clean-up workers

In this time of Covid, to come in contact with all the houses of a particular vicinity, to engage in collecting all their used remains, pose a threat. The spread of disease is more in this case. Sabida, who is a clean-up worker and a member of the Kudumbasree, says that even at this stage the Government turns a blind eye towards the safety measures of clean-up workers. "Generally, the work that we do is disease-prone and risky. And in the midst of all these, is the Covid. At this point, the authorities ought to do something for our safety. But other than providing certain instructions, neither the corporation nor the authorities interfere in our matters. In this situation, we had to buy masks, gloves, sanitisers, hand wash etc. all by ourselves. Some private firms and individuals helped us by providing masks and sanitisers", says Sabida.

The attitude of society towards the clean-up workers is another grave issue. Usually, when someone is affected with Covid, they inform others and isolate themselves. However, the infected family do not inform the clean-up workers regarding the disease which is a major concern. "It is saddening when the families hide the fact that there are infected members in

their family. Often, days later, when other families inform us, we get to know that there were infected ones in the houses that we had visited earlier. It is disappointing that since we are working in the lower tier, they do not consider us as humans. For most of the families, it is as if our illness is not a matter of their botheration." Says Susheela- a clean-up worker.

In the initial stage, the clean-up workers were able to identify the houses, covid positive cases, details of the people observing quarantine etc. thereby excluding those houses from collecting garbage. However, later as the outbreak of the disease increased, it became impossible to identify who all are infected or who all are under quarantine.

70 years old Devaki Amma, from Mankavu is still working, resisting her age-old diseases. With osteoarthritis, she has difficulties walking. Still, she manages to collect waste from several houses. Even at the age of 70, Devaki Amma is worried if she will have to get on to the streets with her bed-ridden husband if her only source of income is done with. "In all these tragic times, we put our life at stake to work. Nipah, flood, covid and what not. On those days, we had never been in the comfort of our homes. During the flood, we used to swim across neck-level water to work. And at the end of the day, ignorance is all that we get. I spent a quarter of my life in the midst of the garbage of this town. I have witnessed the growth of this city. The beauty of this city is a result of my sweat and toil. Yet neither do I have a land of my own nor a roof over my head. Tomorrow, if I am unable to work, I have no idea how I will survive. Despite working in this garbage and dirt for decades, I am penniless to consult a doctor and buy some medicines if I have fallen ill." As Devaki Amma said this, her eyes were filled with tears.

(Translated from Malayalam to English)

Grehokarmir Lockdown Poristhitir Chabi (Domestic Workers Struggle During The Lockdown)

Jahida Parbin

7 June 2021, Dainik Jagran Adhikar

When we say domestic worker, we usually depict a woman doing housework in others' houses. In many parts of the country, women are seen working as domestic workers. There is a perception that only women have to do the housework. In a patriarchal society, most women have to take responsibility for household chores. In addition, women workers are not paid a fair price. They are also considered inferior in society as they work in other people's houses.

Besides, it is wrong not to pay a woman equal to a man in exchange for labour.

Although women work as domestic workers in urban households in a large number, some domestic workers are seen in rural areas also. Domestic workers are engaged in household chores in different ways, such as part-time or full-time. In addition to cooking and taking care of the children in the house, a woman worker has to do everything from cleaning the house to washing clothes, washing dishes, preparing tea and refreshments. They work as housemaids and run their own homes. But the remuneration of all domestic workers is meagre.

In comparison to their labour, they get a minimal amount of rupees fifteen hundred and two thousand rupees per month. It is also essential to consider where and how to place the child of a housemaid when she leaves her home to work as a housemaid in someone else's house. Who will look after the child left at home?

It is a matter of concern whether the house owner takes care of the protection of the child or not if the housemaid takes it with her.

Does the owner take responsibility for the housemaid's treatment if she is sick? Does the owner deduct the worker's payment if she cannot attend her duty due to illness for a couple of days?

In such cases, there should be a benefit to the domestic worker. Looking at the situation created by the lockdown, 100% of the domestic workers were absent from work. Flats or houses in different parts of Guwahati where women used to work as housemaids were shut down, and the housemaids were kept away from work. Moreover, women working in non-government organizations taking care of and cleaning premises, preparing tea etc., had to lose their jobs. As a result, these women have to suffer from frustration, an uncertain future and financial crisis.

In 2020, many domestic workers will be compelled to quit their jobs in the lockdown due to COVID-19. This is because no one kept domestic workers during the lockdown. And since the domestic workers were not allowed to work in those extended lockdowns, they were not given, except by one or two employers, any of the payments or the meagre wages that they used to get in exchange for the work. The owners did not allow any domestic worker to work – part-time or full time. Therefore, it has been challenging for a domestic worker to run her household in such a situation.

This is because most housemaids come from the villages to the cities to work as housemaids, and the meagre wages they get in return, they send to their parents in the town or spend in studies of their children and other things.

Thus, it is seen that a large number of domestic workers are forced to live a life of uncertainty after losing their jobs in lockdown. The cost of children's education could not be paid. Eventually, the women are deprived of the meagre amount they earn.

Laili Begum, a 45-year-old domestic worker. This woman from a remote area of Dhubri came to Guwahati as a child with her aunt. The flood-affected family had sent Laili Begum to Guwahati due to the financial crisis. The idea behind it was that she might survive somehow, be it by doing domestic work in someone else's house.

For the past few years, she worked as a housemaid in others' houses. But in last year's Covid 19 lockdown, she had to lose the work done as a housemaid.

Her husband used to earn by driving, but he has not gotten any work since last year's lockdown and has had no income since. Therefore, both of them face a situation where it is impossible to run the house without work.

Lily used to run the family with the earnings from working as a housemaid. However, losing their jobs have pushed them into debt. Since there is no income from domestic work, she runs her family from the earnings of a small pan shop on the sidewalk in Guwahati. She borrowed Rs—2,500 from someone on interest to start a pan shop. Later, an NGO named Foundation for Social Transmission supported her with an umbrella, bucket, mug, and other essential things to run the shop efficiently.

The umbrella protected her from the rains and sunlight at the pan shop under the open sky on the sidewalk. Otherwise, keeping the shop open in the sizzling sunlight is very difficult. Moreover, rain would damage the shop. Laili Begum says, "She is running a pan shop, and it is a new experience for her.

Starting a new venture is not a cakewalk. For Laili, it was challenging to keep the shop open for extended periods due to lockdown. Besides, the sales volume was relatively low. On the other hand, materials for the shop are unavailable. It happens so that betel leaf may not be available when the nut is there. The customer, in such cases, becomes displeased and does not appear a second time. And that's why there's no profit from the store, says Laili."

She further added that one day for being late by a few minutes in shutting down the store, the police had imposed a fine of Rs. 300 besides threatening to drag her to the police station if it recurs in future. In these ways, domestic workers face financial crises and mental turmoil. Purabi Das, a 32-year-old domestic worker, came from Dhubri to Guwahati. She managed her family, earning meagrely by being a housemaid. Lockdown made her lose all her work. Her husband, a construction worker, too, had no job because of lockdown.

They were clueless about managing their children's education and putting food on the table. They often eat starch as dal due to an absence of vegetables and essential grains. If the lockdown is prolonged, the lives of many domestic workers like Purabi Das will be further endangered. Mira Adhikari, a 36-year-old woman, has worked as a housemaid in Guwahati for 20 years. Meera, with her husband, came to start a new life in Guwahati from a remote village of Nalbari. They had no chance of earning in the village. Helpless, she worked as a housemaid in the houses of various people. Her husband, a carpenter, could not do any carpentry work due to poor conditions.

The family with two daughters runs meagrely. Whatever little the woman earned by working as a housemaid, she spent for the family and education of the girl children. However, due to the lockdown, she could not work and did not earn any money.

She had borrowed money at interest for her daughters' college admission fees, dresses etc. Meera has endless dreams for the future of her two daughters. She says that he has worked as a housemaid so that she might build a better future for both the girls. Meera wants to make her first daughter a nurse. She wants her second daughter to be a teacher in the future. She is struggling through a difficult path pursuing her dreams. The lockdown has put a strain on the lives of domestic workers.

The women from the villages come to the city to work as housemaids to run the family, bear the expenses of children's education and look after the parents with whatever they get in exchange for their services. Many women move from the village to the city to fulfil the basic needs of the family and their daily lives by doing housework in people's homes. But the labour law does not say anything directly about them. The life of all domestic workers without any rights can be described as a life of dark slavery.

Special care must be taken to ensure that domestic workers are treated well, adequately fed, clothed, treated, cared for, and protected from sexual harassment.

For the good of both the employer and the housemaid, there should be a contract, employment letter, identity card, timely payment, festival allowance, medical facilities, education, amusement, sleep, and cleanliness. We should all think that the treatment we seek from the person we hire should be the same as our treatment of all subordinates.

In various parts of India, non-government organizations are working for the rights of domestic workers. In Guwahati, a few organizations have already taken the lead, including the Grehkarmi Adhikar Suraksha Samitee (GASS - Domestic Workers' Rights Protection Committee), which has demanded assurance to the social security of domestic workers.

Leading the organization, prominent social worker Puja Nirala has taken various steps to address the issues of lockdown that have complicated domestic workers' lives. Puja says that they are working relentlessly to ascertain the rights of domestic workers. Furthermore, as a GASS entrepreneur or individual, she has trained domestic workers to make them aware of their rights and security.

Puja Niralaya also said that they have recently held a protest meeting demanding protection of the rights of domestic workers and called for the fulfilment of some demands for domestic workers under the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008.

They call for speedy enactment of Social Security Act at the state level for domestic workers, provision of pension of Rs. 3,000, provision of education and scholarship for children, affix maternity expenses of minimum Rs. 20000, affix medical aid at Rs. 3,00,000, increase the minimum wage to Rs. Fifty per hour, maintain registration and increase the number of employees in the labour department.

In the meantime, a virtual seminar titled "Mann ki Baat" is instituted at the initiative of GASS. Sumitra Paswan and Rita Das, two domestic helpers, took part in the online program to portray the minds of all the domestic workers. They highlighted the troubles they faced during the lockdown.

Regarding the importance of vaccination, Rita Das, a house worker in the unorganized sector, said that online registration has deprived illiterate women like her of easy access to vaccination. The two participants describe in the program that the house owners (employers) forbade them to go to their homes as they work in multiple houses.

No worker without the vaccination is allowed to work in the place of any employer. Therefore, if a domestic worker goes out to work without being vaccinated, the householder is unsafe and the domestic worker. Women who are called domestic workers do not get a worker's dignity even by working all day long.

There is no set time limit for permanent domestic workers. Or she can't spend the time on her own.

In addition, there is no fixed wage and no protection of rights for domestic workers who temporarily work in a household. We have a law for workers, human rights law in our constitution, but not all domestic workers are directly covered by this law.

All contributions of domestic workers are ignored as unorganized workers. And they are deprived of all rights. Their rights need to be ensured by the government at the earliest.

(Translated from Assamese to English)

Unheard Life Of Single Women From Unorganised Sector

Priyanka Tupe

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After my conversation with women in the courtyard of Buddha Vihar at Bharat Nagar Slums, Chembur, I left uphill to meet people residing on top. I saw an elderly woman, maybe in her late 60s, wearing a red sari, tanned skin with a mask, carrying a purse and bag of vegetables. Nazma Qureshi, all tired and restless, was returning home from work; that is when I met her. Nazma took me to her house, a seven by seven-room with four walls, a roof, and a cemented passage with few utensils, the house smelling weird with a tiny damp space as a bathroom. The narrow lanes, filthy surroundings outside the hut were unpleasant views to watch. These were inhuman conditions for any individual to live in. But Nazma breathes and lives in these circumstances every day. Further, COVID-19 worsened Nazma's livelihood.

Before COVID-19, Nazma earned a living by working on construction sites as a labourer; her primary role was picking concrete mix and taking it to another place. She earned around Rs.250/- to Rs.300/- daily. Coronavirus induced lockdown dented her work. Even her differently-abled son lost his job. However, in January 2021 somewhat their livelihood was back on track. After that, all the responsibility fell upon her. For the last 20 years, after the death of her husband, she had single-handedly taken charge of her family. During the COVID lockdown period, they could not afford basic food. When Nazma got to work, she bought vegetables for Rs.20. Other days they ate prasad from a nearby temple.

As per the schemes, each family is entitled to four kg rice and six kg of wheat on a ration card from the ration shop. During COVID-19, the central government under 'Garib Kalyan Yojana' provided free ration. Nazma received it only once. She is not a beneficiary of other schemes such as 'Shravanbal Yojana' and 'Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana'. Nazma says, "Under Ujjwala Yojana we filled the form for gas, but then the kerosene on the ration was discontinued. PM Modi just says Ujjwala Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana, but no gas was provided. Finally, after waiting for so long, we took gas from my son's earnings, and now due to a lockdown, he is jobless. Refilling gas costs us Rs. 850/-, from where should I bring money with no stable job".

Single Women and their peril

Nazma is not alone suffering the perils of Covid-19. Many single women have the same distress to share; only stories are distinct. Shevubai Bhingardive, a 72-year-old, is solely responsible for managing her finances. She runs a tea stall outside Bharat Nagar, HP colony, for livelihood. After her husband's demise and children's unwillingness to take care of her, she continued her husband's business of selling tea. She wakes up at 5 in the morning and works till 9 in the night. However, during the lockdown, her business suffered terribly. Shevubai has no one to care for her health or even escort her to the hospital for vaccination. The government made no efforts in providing jobs door to door for at least single women.

Ration Card and the Struggle to Avail Ration

Bharat Nagar Slums is just one example to highlight the jeopardised life of single women. Across the country, there are millions of single women from lower socio-economic settings suffering in utmost poverty. The life of such women depends on the ration sanctioned by the government. Anusha Kamble anxiously pointed out, "Are we animals to eat such rotten ration, you won't even feel like touching it. It is full of stones, rat-goose dung. Do you eat such filthy food!" Other women from the neighbourhood complained of irregularity receiving ration or sometimes receiving less than entitled.

To confirm the complaints of women, I visited Hari Om Ration Shop. I witnessed Sabina Begum desperately requesting ration from the owner of Hari Om Ration Shop. Sabina Begum was denied ration at a nearby ration shop, so she came to Hari Om. However,

even Hari Om refused to give her the correct amount. On asking- why Sabina was denied her right to ration, the owner dismissed my reservations with a vague answer and half-heartedly gave her the food grains.

Women's rights & Governance Corruption

The pandemic had adversely affected vulnerable sections of society and mainly caused a significant impact on single women's lives. These women face many challenges while tackling economic issues, social security, providing a safe environment to family, education of the children, and self-safety. Comparatively, single women undergo physical, mental, and emotional stress due to a lack of support.

For the last 20 years, Shabana Shaikh has lived as a single woman. She hails from a small village in Vajapur Taluka, Aurangabad. Shabana is a victim of child marriage and later a premature widow. However, her sufferings never broke her spirits. While raising her child, she also works as a social worker at the community level. Shabana exclaimed, "I am an Anganwadi Sevika. My salary is Rs. 8000/-. With the origin of coronavirus, my salary became irregular. Even today, my salary is credited late and to save money we've cut down on essentials such as tea".

Shabana works for single women and their rights. She helps them avail government schemes; while doing so; she faces many challenges posed by government officers. Shabana, emphasising corruption, says, "Despite having all the papers in place, no work is done without giving money. For further approvals, at least we need to Rs.5000/- to Rs.6000/- per file. In case, if we deny paying they purposefully find problems in the paperwork. It is not feasible for a daily wagger to visit government offices every now and then. It cost them wages of a day and extra money on travelling. Hence, after a while, the woman lowers her guard and pays the money to avoid the tiring process; due to this corruption, needy women often get no benefits from these schemes".

Did the relief packages do justice to single women's problems?

Amid the coronavirus-induced lockdown, the government of Maharashtra announced relief packages for rickshaw pullers, domestic workers, and labourers working in the unorganised sector. Under the package, women working in various fields from the unorganised sector were supposed to receive Rs.1500/-. Primarily, this one-time payment was inadequate, and due to chaos during implementation, it failed to reach many beneficiaries. Sunil Ahire, an activist working with the Women Domestic Workers Association in Kalyan, states, "Majority of women registered with us are single women. Few are widowed or abandoned by their husbands. They worked in different parts of Kalyan and Ulhasnagar. During the lockdown, not livelihood but also failed to avail the government-sanctioned ration. The reason was either not having an Aadhar card or Aadhar linked Ration cards. To receive the help of Rs.1500/- certain procedures are needed to be followed. First, fill the form online and attach mandatory documents for which computers or smartphones are required. Many failed to present correct documents, and few had no gadgets to allow them to do so; therefore unable to register with the Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board. Inabilities to register rendered the package useless.

Another challenge faced by women to avail themselves of the benefits was mobility. Ahire pointed out, "we helped women to fill the form at the association office but still many failed to do so. The immobility of trains, buses, and other public transport restricted women from travelling to the office. Also, they were unable to afford rickshaws due to no work. These challenges were not well thought of while declaring the attractive package".

According to Ahire, these challenges come later. The major challenge was acquiring membership of the State Domestic Workers Welfare Board. Women first have to get themselves registered with the District Commissioner of Labour office or Tehsil office. As a part of the process, they needed to submit details of the employer such as name, phone number and a signed letter. In addition, an Aadhar card, Ration card, age proof, and a photo is required to verify the identity. The membership certificate and ID card are issued

as per the will of the concerned authority. Many even failed to get the letters from their employers due to fear of COVID-19.

Looking towards other schemes provided under the 'Domestic Workers Welfare Board' membership, they are of little help. Women can enrol themselves in skill development courses at Yashwantrao Chavan Open University; other than that, it has no unique traits. There is no clarity about the process to access the training course, as pointed out by Sunil Ahire. Moreover, with the future aspiration of getting elected in Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, political parties are collecting records from women in slums for registration. Further, nothing concrete is done, no relief is provided. Everything is just to woo people for votes!

Women Waste Picker's Dilemma

Similar to the domestic workers, women rag-pickers have their own story. 90% of women registered with Kagad, Kaach, Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) are single women. Approximately KKPKP, a Pune-based organisation, has over 8000 women listed. During the pandemic, few women working with Swachh Abhigyan affiliated to the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) were employed, especially women who collected waste from door to door. Women, who earned their livelihood by selling garbage, scrap material for recycling to Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC), lost all their work. Factories and industrial complexes were closed, resulting in zero availability of work. These women and their families were heavily dependent upon KKPKP. During this period, Swachh workers, despite having jobs, we're burdened with an increased financial burden.

Maitreyi Shankar, an official at KKPKP, said, "due to the hostile environment, slum dwellers were scared of waste collectors. So they opposed them, arguing that they could be the potential spreaders of the virus."

Exclusions of a tabooed section of women

Given the financial problems of single women, the relief package had ample loopholes. What were the shortcomings? How was it to be implemented effectively? To answer these questions, we contacted State's Women and Child Development Minister Yashomati Thakur but had no response.

Further, Renuka Kad of Aurangabad, a social activist working for single women's rights, said, "Single women were acknowledged while formulating the policy. How was this amount decided? Were their needs weighed before announcing such decisions The nominal amount of Rs.1500/- was enough for an individual to survive, was it?" A single woman's plight is not a priority for the government's policy framework. However, it requires attention. For example, there was an urgent need for policies to address these women during the pandemic, but it did not happen.

A single women's definition cannot be restricted to widows, abandoned or divorced women; it should also include transwomen and sex workers. These vulnerable sections of women lack documents pushing them furthermore towards helplessness. These sections were never part of the government's plan, so they profited nothing from the policies. It is not just about exclusions in the guidelines but about the violation of the human rights of these women. One should look through this issue from the glasses of human rights.

(Translated from Marathi to English)

Single Women: Need For More Inclusive Policies On Social Security

Priyanka Tupe

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"He harassed me. During the night, I checked the door lock ten times just to feel safe. Despite being sure, I was always fearful. I wanted to sustain my job, so I kept tolerating it. Several times I thought of talking to his wife about his behaviour but never did. It became unbearable. However, with a little courage, I told my cousin about everything and she came to my rescue. I did lose my job and also my dignity. I was blamed for everything that happened", says Savita. Savita, a 21-year-old woman who works as a domestic worker, was sexually harassed by her employer. Savita now takes care of her mother and siblings. She worked as a house help in a society located at Hadapsar, Pune. During the second lockdown, she was on the verge of losing her job as travelling from Sinhgad road to Hadapsar was impossible. Apart from this, her employer was sceptical about the frequent visitors they had at home. Savita was offered to work as a live-in house help with two days off every month till the lockdown got over. Savita accepted it for her family as she was the only breadwinner of her house. After 15 days of her arrival, the male member of the family started harassing her sexually and touching her inappropriately. He also threatened her to keep her mouth shut; otherwise, she would lose her job.

On asking- why no complaint was lodged with police? She said, "We are poor people. No one would listen to us. My former employer confidently told me to do whatever I wanted. He said none would listen to me because I was just a maid. His wife, too, refused to believe her husband would do anything. She openly challenged me to complain to the police. Also, the bureau that hired me told me not to get involved with the police. They warned me, saying going to the police will do no good to me. The person will be released on bail immediately, considering their financial status. This would also bring disgrace to my character and work record. They also alarmed me that the former employer may file a reverse case of theft, and no one will bail me out. So, I might lose everything- my work, my dignity. So, I decided to forget everything and work somewhere else."

Lockdown and Sexual Harassment

Likewise, ample women experienced sexual harassment during the COVID-19 induced lockdown. Similar incidents took place in Aurangabad. Social Activist Renuka Kad stated, "Her brother in law sexually harassed a single woman working as a house help in the Harsul area. She walked 10 km to a police station to file a complaint against him. However, the police did not take her complaint seriously. They avoided registering her complaint, citing the COVID-19 related workload. The lawyer intruded and then filed the complaint on knowing about the entire incident.

Social workers reported multiple incidents of sexual harassment. Amidst the lockdown, the sexual assault on single women increased tremendously. Although no statistical report is released on the issue, such crimes occur repeatedly, claims social workers, researchers, and activists.

Preeti Karmarkar is a social activist raising awareness about the Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Act (POSH) and is a member of the anti-sexual harassment complaint committee. She says, "Our system does not find women's issues of utmost priority. During the lockdown, women's issues found its place at the bottom of the list. The whole administrative system focused on the main issue of emergency, forgetting the by-product of it. Usually, women feel helpless concerning their issues, but the intensity has increased during this period. Lockdown prohibited their mobility outside the house. Removing frustration regarding their male counterparts became difficult. In the case of single women, it has become even worse."

Niti Ayog called for reports from various stakeholders on the exploitation of women during the COVID-19 period. On this, Karmarkar says, "We appealed to widen the definition of the Disaster Management Act, so as to include organisations working on women's issues in essential services. Since exclusion from essential services, we failed to connect on the ground and work against atrocities on women. We tried to resolve these issues over the phone with the administrative officials. From here onwards, the government should include such NGOs in essential services."

Nari Samata Manch published a survey report last year (July 2020) on the diverse effects on men and women due to pandemic-induced lockdown. Eighty-one single women participated in the survey, all of them at least having a bachelor's degree and a job or business in terms of financial self-sufficiency. Six women (7%) said that violence against them increased during the lockdown. However, the proportion was higher as 30 out of 81 women participants left the question-'Did they face any violence?' unanswered. As a result, the proportion of women victims may be higher than estimated.

Adolescent Girls Security and their Safety

COVID-19 brought restrictions on the working of schools and colleges. Students were forced to sit at home. The female ragpickers worked when their children were at school in the given situation. Now, it has become challenging as they are frightened of children getting under the evil influence of the slums, such as substance use. So single women started taking their children to their workplace. Women were also petrified of the sexual harassment their adolescent daughters could face in their absence.

Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayati (KKPKP) surveyed 3399 waste pickers from 15 administrative wards of the Pune district. Two hundred fourteen children accompanied their mother to her work. Among them, 103 children were school-going, and 50 children were yet to enrol in school. Data on girls depicts 40 girl children are going to school, and 21 had not yet started school. The data represents only one city. The results also raise questions on the safety of children all over the state. In fact, as per the report, the lack of safe childcare facilities has contributed to the increase in child labour.

An activist at KKPKP, Sayali Savita Pradeep, said, "These children were safe at the workplace from the possible threat in slums, but the workplace posed other challenges:

- Outside the home, there was a risk involving COVID-19.
- There was no safe zone such as the plank, parks, public library where kids could sit, rest, play or read. Sometimes children were allowed to relax in the premises of the building; otherwise, these children would play anywhere.
- Children's minds are negatively impacted seeing their mothers working in such an unsafe environment.

Child Marriage at its peak

Child marriage increased in Maharashtra. The factors that pushed it were the pandemic, followed by the lockdown of colleges and schools. KKPKP reported three child marriages all over the Pune district. However, the numbers might be higher, as reported by Maitrey Shankar of KKPKP. Pushpa resides in the Taljai area and works as a waste picker. Pushpa is survived by four children (2 daughters & 2 sons) and a differently-abled husband. The husband cannot work, so she is the lone breadwinner of the house. During the lockdown, she fixed her 13-year-old daughter Kavita's marriage. When KKPKP officials were made aware of the issue, they confronted Kavita's parents and convinced them to cancel the wedding. Senior activist Vaishali Sakpal said, "They were more concerned about daughter security than her marriage. We also spoke to them about shifting their daughters to the hostel and taking care of their accommodation and education. However, the couple cancelled the wedding but disagreed with the hostel proposal.

Further, she adds, "When parents do not listen to us, we use the language of the law. Finally, they more often listen to us, but there is no guarantee of stopping child marriage. Sometimes they may get the girl married in a secret ceremony in their hometowns.

Community leaders help us to monitor such situations. Nonetheless, COVID-19 made it tough to reach out to Child Welfare Associations. Further, everything becomes complex once the girl is married off. Everything depends on the girl's firm will of getting out of the marriage. Sakubai, a waste picker from Warje- Karve Nagar slum, fixed her 15 years old daughter's wedding out of concern for her safety.

Marriage was postponed after the interference of the KKPKP. Later, Sakubai organised a secret ceremony at the request of her daughter. Sayali added, "several times we counselled her but she was firm on her decision of getting married. Often, girls escape poverty, the slum environment, find marriage a life-changing opportunity. Child marriages cannot perish within a day. Government has to provide free childcare facilities for single women's children, study facilities for teenagers, playgrounds, and many more. This will help subdue child marriage and adolescent addiction to some extent."

Single Women & Disability

Regardless of their socio-economic status, single women have to deal with many social security issues. The vulnerability increases when gender, socio-economic status, and physical disability intersect. Writer, translator Sonali Nawangul is a disabled single woman. She depends on her assistant for mobility. Sonali pointed, "Due to my social identity, I was well received by the hospital for vaccination but what about other disabled women? Currently, issuing of disability certificates is also debarred. The existing certificate has to be renewed every five years. The renewal procedures involve visiting civil surgeons and getting a complete check-up. Due to COVID-19, getting a doctor's appointment was stressful. The pension of my parents was stalled. It is challenging for a single disabled woman to get procedures done, especially in times of coronavirus. The administration should consider all these problems and formulate policies". Sonali's view reflects that policies for differently-abled single women should be more inclusive. The levels and types of disability could be different. The policymakers should consider all of the layers of the issue.

According to the 2011 census, there are 7.14 crore single women in India, while Maharashtra ranks second among the states. 4,44,00,000 women live in rural India. In comparison, 62,86,892 women resided in Maharashtra. In ten years, this figure might have risen. Unfortunately, the 2021 proposed census was not carried owing to the coronavirus pandemic, so the updated figures are not available at present. Few NGOs have estimated that around 20,000 women became widows after losing their spouses to COVID-19.

There is a considerable number of single women in the state. It is necessary to formulate effective policies for them. Social activist Heramb Kulkarni has created a network of volunteers through social media to help the government formulate policies. So far, the government has come up with a few policies to help Covid -19 widows and single women financially. Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation started rendering financial help of Rs.1.5 lakh for business purposes. For self-employment-related equipment, it announced assistance of Rs.1 lakh. Packages are alright, but what about single women's social security? The answers are nowhere to find in the current policies. The government requires setting a discourse with stakeholders to develop a policy framework on social security. Otherwise, thousands of Savita will succumb to sexual harassment, and lakhs of Kavita's will get stuck into the evils of child marriage.

(Translated from Marathi to English)

Ontaraina Amma...Corona Tho Pillalaki Dooram (Mothers Isolated In Most Families Due To Corona Pandemic)

Avula Yamuna
8 June 2021, V6 Velugu

పిల్లలు ఎప్పుడూ తన కళ్లముందు ఉండాలని అనుకుంటుంది తల్లీ. కానీ, ఆ కోరిక ఓ కలగానే మిగులుతోంది చాలామంది తల్లీలకు. అది తలుట్కోలేక తలదాచుకోవడం తల్లీ మనసు. ఈ కొవిడ్ ట్రాంలో ఈ బాధలు ఇంకా పెరిగాయి. ఇంటికి దూరంగా ఉన్న పిల్లలు ఎలా ఉన్నారో అనే బెంగ ఒక వైపు, తమకేమనాన అయితే పటిష్టమవుతున్నారా? అనే ఆందోళన మరొక వైపు. వాయిడెమిక్ కే ముందు ధైర్యంగా ఉన్న తల్లీలలో కూడా ఇప్పుడు ఒక రకమైన గుబులు మొదలైంది.

మామూలు రోజుల్లో పిల్లలు దూరంగా ఉన్నా సరదాగా నాలుగు మాటల్లో డానికి, బాగోగులు పంచుకోవడానికి ఇరుగుపొరుగు ఉంటారు. అప్ కౌన్సిల్... పిల్లలంతా ఎమోషనల్ సపోర్ట్ బయటి వాళ్లు ఇవ్వకపోయినా కొంతైనా మనసుకి ఊరట కలుగుతుంది. కానీ, కొవిడ్ వల్ల.. ఎక్కడెక్కడా వాళ్లు అక్కడే సట్ అయ్యారు. డాంట్ ఒకరితో ఒకరు మాటల్లో కోవడం తగ్గిపోయింది. అందుకే, ఎంత వదదనుకున్నా పిల్లల గురించిన ఆలోచనలు తల్లీలలో వదలలేదు. ఆ బాధను ఎవరితోనూ పంచుకోలేక కుమిలపోతున్నారని. కొవిడ్ లాంటి అత్యవసర పరిస్థితుల్లో... పిల్లలు తమ దగ్గర లోకపోవడానికే తలుట్కోలేకపోతున్నారని. ఈ వాయిడెమిక్ వల్ల ఒంటరితనం, భయం వాళ్లలో 'ఎయిట్ నెనెస్ సిండ్రోమ్'ని పెంచుతోంది. చాలా సరేవులు కూడా ఈ మాట చెబుతున్నాయి. కానీ, రీయలైటీకి మా సిస్టమ్.. సటిల్ లో వెబ్ నెట్ వినడానికంటే కూడా ఈ సిండ్రోమ్ తో బాధపడే వాళ్ల మన దేశంలో ఎక్కువ మంది ఉన్నారట.

తల్లీలలోనే ఎందుకంటే...

తండీతో పోలిస్తే... తల్లీలలో ఎక్కువమంది ఇలుల్ దాటి వెళ్లారు. మగవాళ్లయితే ఆఫీస్ కి వెళ్లారు. నాయత్ రంపె రిండెన్స్ కలుసుకుంటారు. ఇంటిలో కనాన్ బయటే ఎక్కువ టైం గడుపుతారు. కానీ, తల్లీకి ఆ అవకాశం ఉండదు. ఉద్యోగాలు చేసే తల్లీలు చాలా తక్కువ. చేసినా.. మగవాళ్లలా సోషల్ ఎంగేజ్ అవడం ఇంకా తక్కువ. కారణం... ఆఫీస్ పని కంట్రీట్ చేసుకుని వచ్చే ఇంటి పని ఎదురు చూసుకుంటుంది. ఆ పని పూర్తయ్యాక పిల్లలతోనే ఎక్కువగా ఎంగేజ్ అవుతుంటారు తల్లీలు. ఉద్యోగాలు చేయని ఆడవాళ్లు అయితే నాలుగోడల మధ్య ఉంటారు. పిల్లల బాగోగులు చూసుకోవడంలోనే వాళ్లకి రోజులు గడిచిపోతాయి. పిల్లలు పెద్దయ్యి, చదువులు పూర్తిచేసుకుని ఉద్యోగాలు వలసిన, పెళ్లి చేసుకుని దూర వారంతాలకో, విదేశాలకో వెళ్లినట్టే తల్లీ మనసు తలుట్కోలేకపోతోంది.

కూర వండేటప్పుడు 'మా వాడికి ఈ కూర అంటే ఎంతపక్వమో' అనిపిస్తుంటుంది. కిటికీలోనుంచి చూసి తే 'మా అమ్మయి ఆ గాల్లో ఆడేది. నేను ఇక్కడ నుంచే చూసి దాని తన అలలోని' అనుకుంటుంది. ఇలా కలలో, ఊహలో, పనులో, వాటలో.. అనిస్ టోల్ పర్తి కష్టం పిల్లల గుర్తుకు వస్తుంటారు తల్లీకి. అది తల్లీ మనసు ఇంకా కుంగడీనుతుంది. ఆ కుంగబాటు మెలలో ఎయిట్ నెనెస్ సిండ్రోమ్ కి దారితీస్తుంది. అయితే ఈ వాయిడెమిక్ వల్ల కొంతమంది తండ్రి లోల్ నూ ఈ ఎయిట్ నెనెస్ సిండ్రోమ్ కనిపిస్తుంది.

వాళ్లలోనే ఎక్కువ

పిల్లల పెంపకాని తల్లీ బాధ్యతగానే చూస్తుంది సొసైటీ. పిల్లల తప్పుప్పు అన్ తల్లీ పెంపకంనే ముడిపెట్టి మాటల్లో తారు. పిల్లలు పుట్టడమే ఆలసయి వాళ్ల ఆశలు, ఆశయాలపై రిసిస్టెన్స్ పెడుతుంది సమాజం. తల్లీలతోమా పిల్లల సంతోషం ముందు మా గోల్స్ చిన్నవి అనుకుంటారు. పెద్దపెద్ద చదువులు చదివినా.. పిల్లలకోసం వంటింటో ఆగిపోయిన తల్లీలు ఎందరో. అలాంటి వాళ్లలోనే ఎయిట్ నెనెస్ సిండ్రోమ్ ఎక్కువగా ఉంటుంది. ఇంత 'చదువుకుని ఏం చేయలేకపోయా.. నాకంటూ ఓ గుర్తింపు లేదు' అన్న బాధ వాళ్లలో నిలవనియదు. అదే కొంతమందిని మనసు కండా సెట్ చేస్తుంది. పాలెటూళ్లతో పోలిస్తే సిటిలోనే ఎయిట్ నెనెస్ సిండ్రోమ్ ఎక్కువగా కనిపిస్తుంది అంటున్నారు సైకియాటిస్ట్ లు. పాలెటూళ్లలో మాటల్లో డానికి ఎవరో ఒకరు ఉంటారు. కానీ, సిటిలో పక్కటి వాళ్లతో కూడా అంతగా పరిచయం ఉండదు. ఎయిట్ నెనెస్ సిండ్రోమ్ సిటిలో పెరగడానికి ఇదే ముఖ్య కారణం. మరి ఈ బాధకి మెడిసిన్ ఏంటి? అంటే... సమాధానం పిల్లల అంటున్నారు ఎక్స్ పర్ట్ లు.

తల్లీకి ఒక మోషన్ ఇవాన్ త

పిల్లలు ఎదిగి గొప్పవాళ్లు అవడం ఎవరికైనా సంతోషమే. కానీ, ఆ పిల్లల ఎదుగుదల కనిపించనంత దూరం వెళ్లాలే? మాత్రం కనిపించనంత వాళ్ల తల్లీలందరినీ బాధపడుతుంటారు. అందులోనూ తల్లీ ఎక్కువగా బాధపడుతుంది. అమ్మపే రిమకు హద్దులు లోపు అంటాకదా! అందుకే, దూరమైతే అమ్మ తలుట్కోలేదు. ఈ కొవిడ్ ట్రాంలో ఒకరికొకరందగ్గర ఉండటం అత్యవసరం అయింది. ఇలాంటి ట్రాంలో పిల్లలు దగ్గర లోనందుకు చాలామంది తల్లీలు ఎయిట్ నెనెస్ సిండ్రోమ్ బారిన పడుతున్నారు. విదేశాలకు వెళ్లి, అక్కడే సెటిల్ అయిన పిల్లలు ఉన్న వాళ్లలో.. ఈ సిండ్రోమ్ ఎక్కువగా కనిపిస్తుంది. వీళ్ల పిల్లల దగ్గరకు పోలేరు. వాయిడెమిక్ రిసిస్టెన్స్ వల్ల పిల్లలు పే రెంజిన్ కి హెల్ప్ చేయలేరు. ఈ పరిస్థితి వాళ్లలో విపరీతమైన భయాని కిర్ యేట్ చేస్తుంది. అందుకే, ఒంటరితనం, విచారంతో బాధపడుతున్నారు. ఏదో కోల్పోయిన ఫీ అంగెన్స్, యాంగ్ టెటి, భయం.. లాంటి కామన్ ఫీ అంగెన్స్ కన్సైరియన్స్ చేస్తున్నారని. కొంతమంది సూసైడ్ ఆలోచనలు చేస్తున్నారని. చేసుకుంటున్నారు కూడా.

ఇలా ఇవ్వటే చాలామంది తమకు తాము నష్టం చేసుకున్నారు. ఆ సీట్ల వరకు వెళ్లకూడదంటే పిలల్ సపోర్ట్ అవసరం. పిలల్లు పీ రెంటన్ కోసం కొంచెం ట్రాంకేటాయించి రోజూ ఫోన్లో మాట్లాడాలి. ఇలా చేసినప్పుడు దూరంగా ఉన్నా... ఎయిట్ నెనట్ సిండోర్మ్ దగ్గరకి కూడా రాదు. “ఈ వాయిండెమిక్ తర్వాత మళ్లీ మనమంతా కలుస్తాం, మునుపటిలా సంతోషంగా గడుపుతాం” అనే మోవీ పిలల్లు పీ రెంటన్కి ఇవ్వడం ముఖ్యం. దూరంగా ఉన్నా.. తమ పీ రెంటన్ కనీసం అవసరాలు తీరచేసి ఇవ్వటానికి ఏదో ఒక విధంగా పాల్ వేసి పీ రెంటన్ పనులు పూర్తి చేయాలి.

- డా. సహనా రజందర్ నాథ్,
సివ్ చీఫ్ ఫౌండర్, టాన్ నన్ ఫర్మేషనల్ కోచ్ అండ్ థెరపిస్ట్

కలిసి ఉంటే బాగుంటుంది

నా కూతురు గొప్పగా ఉండాలని కోరుకున్నాను. కానీ, తనకి దూరంగా ఉండాలని ఎప్పుడూ అనుకోలేదు. కరోనా కాలంలో అందరూ ఇంటి దగ్గరే ఉంటే బాగుంటుంది అనిపిస్తుంది. కానీ, మా అమ్మాయి ఆ సీట్ బర్ అయితే ఉంటుంది. కరోనా వల్ల తను ఇక్కడికి రాలేని పరిస్థితి. ఈ వయసులో మాకు కరోనా సోకితే ఎలా? అని చాలానెరుల్ అనిపిస్తుంది. పిలల్లు చిన్నగా ఉన్నప్పుడు ఇల్లు ఎంత సందడిగా ఉంటుంది... జీవితాంతం అలాగే ఉంటే బాగుంటుంది అనిపిస్తుంది. కానీ, ఏం చేయగలం? మళ్లీ మంచి రోజులు రావాలని. కోరుకోవడం తప్పవ్..

- ఉపవీల నవ్వు ప, పౌ దరాబాద్
ట్రాంకేటాయింపలేకపోయాం

చిన్నప్పుడు వాళ్లను ఉన్నత సిట్లలో ఉంచాలని చాలా కష్టపడ్డాం. ఆ కష్టంలో పిలల్ కోసం ట్రాంకేటాయింపలేకపోయాం. వాళ్లకు మంచి కెరీర్ అందించడంలో సక్సెస్ అయ్యింది. ఇప్పుడు వాళ్లతో గడుపుదాం అనుకుంటే... వాళ్లకే సిట్లో, మేముకే సిట్లో. పైగా ఈ కొవిడ్ భయం. ఆలోచించాదు అనుకున్నాను.. పిలల్లు గుర్తు రాకుండా ఉంటారా?

- ఎమ్. రమ, వరంగల్ రూరల్



HOLDING WOMEN BACK : CUSTOMS AND PRACTISES

Destructive beliefs and behaviours are deeply embedded in our society, keeping women under the control of men. Despite the Indian Constitution guaranteeing women equality before the law under Article 14, the articles in this section showcase the positive impact of using the media to change attitudes toward regressive gender norms and practices. It highlights successful approaches and critical insights to promote and highlight the rights of girls and women. It is important for journalists to cover regressive age-old customs because they deprive girls and women of their fundamental rights. For the *Laadli* Media Fellows, this was a chance to advocate for the rights of girls and women, especially in rural areas. Their work inspires others and to debate and learn about approaches to end harmful traditions and the underlying social norms.

This section covers issues of one of the most marginalised groups - women. An interesting article titled, 'Amidst Covid, Rajasthan Villagers Hunt Witches', by Madhav Sharma points out the grim reality of social prejudices prevalent in rural societies that make a woman 'a witch'. It highlights their journey from stigma to social exclusion and death by collating various case studies from the Bhilwara district. It also shows how the pandemic has been the worst period for ostracised women.

Haryana-based Bhartesh Singh highlights the critical challenges prevalent in Haryana in his articles. His first article, 'Haryana Sees Spurt In Child Pregnancy Cases', highlights the causes and consequences of child pregnancies. Cases registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act define a person below 18 years as a child. 54 pregnancies (more than four per month) were reported in Haryana last year. In addition, it brings to light the absence of effective mechanisms for implementing the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021, under which the pregnancy can be aborted up to 24 weeks instead of 20. His second article, titled 'Elopement Of Minor Girls On the Rise In Haryana', highlights an increase in cases from 4.7 percent to 31.4 percent despite COVID - 19. It draws attention to various provisions offered by the government and their consequences.

In his third article titled, 'Sexual Abuse Cases In Marriages On The Rise In Haryana' highlights the faultlines in-laws which violate women's right to privacy, health, life, and liberty due to marital rape. He compiles viewpoints of various officials assigned to administer the law appropriately, who point to the fact that there is an urgent need for the judiciary to recognize marital rape as an offence under the Indian Penal Code, especially amid a surge in domestic and sexual violence cases due to the pandemic-induced lockdown.

Poorvi Gupta, in her article titled 'Ghoonghat Continues To Limit Women's Autonomy in Haryana', showcases the patriarchal tradition, the ghoonghat or the purdah system, which bars women from making progress. While doing so, she provides profiles of various women and their effort to end this system.

UNICEF estimates that at least 1.5 million girls under 18 get married in India each year, making it home to the most significant number of child brides in the world. 'Vaillo Bibah Ek Samajik Byadhi (Child Marriage - A Social Evil)', an article by Jahida Parbin, brings an account of a 15 yr old girl married off to a 72-year-old man on for money and land. It also highlights how children's rights to health and education are exploited. Similarly Avula Yamuna's article 'Chinnari Pelli Kuthullu Akkuvaitunnaru (Child Brides Are On Rise In The World)' depicts the alarming increase in the number of child brides in Telangana during the pandemic. The article बाल विवाह : काल बनता कोरोना काल by Vijay Sharma also portrays the rising cases of child marriages during COVID-19.

Shafeeq Thamarassery's article, 'Sthreedhanakkola, 212 Maranangal, Prathikalaru (Dowry Murders : 212 deaths; Who Are The Culprits?)' highlights the rise in gruesome dowry murders in Kerala. In doing so, he studies cases of families who were pushed into the bottomless pit of debt by marriage and dowry expenses. Unfortunately, the existing social practises and norms support this social evil.

On similar lines, Haroon Reshi, in his article, 'Violence Against Women: A Reality That Goes Un-Or-Under-Reported, And Largely Unnoticed In Kashmir', highlights the plight of women in Kashmir and how cases of domestic violence cases in the Valley point towards social silence, tolerance, and inhibition.

Amidst Covid Rajasthan Villagers Hunt 'Witches' In COVID Response Watch

Madhav Sharma

2 November 2021, countercurrents.org

On the 4th of October, 2021, an attempt was made to kill a woman in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan by calling her a 'witch'. The victim is a resident of Ulela village of Jahazpur block. This is not the first incident of women being accused of being 'witches' and even killed in Bhilwara district, nor will it probably be the last.

According to local social workers, this is the fourth incident in the district in the last two months in which a woman has been declared a 'witch' and beaten up. Most of the incidents of making women out to be 'witches' in Rajasthan are in Bhilwara district itself.

According to the complaint lodged with the Jahazpur police station, a person named Foru from the same village started beating the victim Badam Devi (55) calling her a 'witch'. Foru believes that his wife's health is deteriorating due to Badam Devi being a 'witch' and she enters his wife's body.

To save her life, Badam Devi ran away from the fields and came to her house, but the accused reached there with an axe in his hand. To escape from Foru, Badam ran again to the fields and fell into a kutchra well. Earlier, Foru had broken her hand with the stick of the axe. After falling into the well, Badam Devi somehow held a stone. She was pulled out after several hours by the villagers working in the fields, alerted by the noise, who lifted her with the help of cots. Injured Badam Devi was admitted to Jahazpur CHC, where she suffered a fracture in one hand and serious injuries were found at various places on her body.

The police have registered a complaint under IPC sections 341 (wrongful restraint), 323 (intentional hurt) and 307 (wilful act likely to cause death). Apart from this, a case has been registered under sections 3 and 4 of the Rajasthan Prevention of Witch Harassment Act.

CI Rajkumar Nayak of Jahazpur police station said that the police arrested the accused and presented him in the court from where he got bail. The woman is currently at her home. Badam is lucky in this case, as the complaint has been registered under the Rajasthan Prevention of Witch Harassment Act because in most cases the police register such cases under IPC sections, which are more lenient.

Covid Response Watch spoke to Tara Ahluwalia, a social worker living in Bhilwara and working since 1980 for the eradication of witchcraft.

"After a long struggle, we were successful in getting the state government to enact a law, but till now the understanding of the police and the common people at the ground level has not been made according to the law. This is the reason why the police register cases of witchcraft under normal sections. This does not give justice to the victims. The accused roam freely in the open" she says. "It has been 6 years since the Rajasthan Witch Harassment Prevention Act came into existence. If convicted under the law, there is a provision of imprisonment for one to five years and fine of 50 thousand rupees, but ironically, till date no accused has been punished through this. Since 2015, more than 280 cases of witch-making have come to the fore. Around 84 cases have been registered in Bhilwara district alone. After the registration of the case, the accused roam out on bail. With this, the rest of the village people also get the impetus to declare women as 'witches', Ahluwalia adds. At the same time, she says, "The law has not been implemented effectively at the ground level. That is why till date no one has been punished. In rural areas, the police have little knowledge of the law. That is why they register a complaint by making the cases of witch torture out to be just a case of quarrel".

Rakesh Sharma , a social worker from Bhilwara, associated with the Dalit , Adivasi and Nomadic Rights campaign in Rajasthan, also agrees with Ahluwalia. "Social prejudice makes a woman a 'witch'. That is why it is the responsibility of the law to punish the guilty. Unfortunately this is not happening. Had the police done their job properly, hundreds of victims would have been rehabilitated and the guilty would have been jailed" he says.

Retired Professor Rajiv Gupta from the Department of Sociology, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur explains in detail about the process and purpose of declaring a witch. "Witch-making works to create fear among people by making up stories. There are many elements of fear and insecurity involved. This is the reason why even the people of the society are hesitant to talk to the victim. This fear and insecurity passes on to the next generation as well," he says.

Lonely, elderly and Dalit women become targets

The main targets of this social evil are the destitute, elderly or Dalit women. More than half of the cases registered are also related to land grab incidents. Bhanwar Meghvanshi, a social worker from Bhilwara, says, "The social structure of villages in our country is very complex. Sometimes the family members do not keep their elderly parents with them. Taking advantage of this, other people in the family or other families take advantage of their loneliness and weakness. Even today superstition is very high in rural society and women are the easiest targets. Since she is destitute and does not have the financial capacity to fight the case. That is why they are declared a 'witch' and socially boycotted and there is often a conspiracy to grab their land."

Journey from stigma to social exclusion and death

The women victims accused of being 'witches' are living in a very bad condition. Due to being declared a 'witch' in the village, they have to live outside the village. Hundreds of women have been socially boycotted. All this stress has a profound effect on the mental and physical health of women. Chandi Bai was one such woman. Carrying the burden of being a 'witch' for life, she died a few months ago.

About 20 years ago, she was declared a 'witch' in her village Chhipapur Pal. The village of Chandi Devi is in Kotri block, about 65 km from Bhilwara. Chandi was living with Tara Ahluwalia in their house for a long time. Tara believes the stigma of being a 'witch' was the reason for her death. She says that Chandi wanted to get rid of that stigma throughout her life, but the people of the village never accepted her as a normal woman. "Disturbed by the daily taunts, she came to me. She did everything to get back in society and family, but could not get rid of the stigma" she says.

The Covid period

The Covid period has been the worst period for women battling the stigma of being a 'witch'. The lockdown of March 2020, which placed a lot of restrictions, had its deep impact on rural areas as well. Even earlier, those accused of being 'witches' were forced to live outside the village or were socially excluded. As a result no one went to meet or talk to them. This isolation worsened during the lockdown. Access to social security schemes are also less for such women. That is why they have to deal with the problem of even obtaining state-provided rations. Rakesh says that transportation was closed due to the lockdown and no help from outside could reach such women and their families.

While there has been no research study on the effect of Covid on women ostracised for being 'witches' there is little doubt that the loneliness and economic condition of these women has only worsened.

Haryana Sees Spurt In Child Pregnancy Cases

Bhartesh Singh Thakur

6 August 2021, The Tribune

A 17-year-old mentally challenged girl, Monu (name changed), had to deliver a child born out of rape by a neighbour. Even as the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of Faridabad pursued the case for abortion, crucial time was lost.

In cases registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, which defines a person below 18 years as a child, 54 pregnancies (more than four per month) were reported in Haryana last year. The Haryana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (HSCPCR) collected this data from CWCs at the district level. Fifteen cases were reported from Gurugram, followed by five each from Palwal and Sonapat.

No abortion due to late reporting

54 pregnancies were reported in Haryana last year

37 in the first five months this year

In the first five months this year, 37 cases were reported, which is more than seven per month. Only in 21 cases, the termination was carried out this year, either by the court order or by the CWC concerned.

Prathna (name changed), who is visually impaired, was just 14-year-old when her stepfather sexually abused her. The crime came to light as she was complaining of stomach pain. But by that time, she was 24-week pregnant and had to deliver the child, whom she later surrendered for adoption. Her mother, who works as a maid and hails from West Bengal, stood by her and got the case registered in June 2020.

Jyoti Baidya, Chairperson, HSCPCR, said, "Most of the victims are poor migrants. The pregnancies are usually detected late. The victims remain in fear if the abuser is from their family. Sometimes delay happens at the level of the CWC or medical board."

Radha (name changed), 15, was sexually abused by her father for over two years. Her mother had died a few years ago. When her father was arrested, she along with her four siblings had to be shifted to a children's home in Gurugram. Her grandmother refused to take her.

The case came to light in October 2020, in Palwal. As the length of pregnancy was over 24 weeks, HSCPCR had approached the Punjab and Haryana High Court for termination. After an opinion from the doctors of Fortis Hospital, Gurugram, the high court didn't allow it. She delivered the child in February this year.

On the complaint of Baidya that in case of child pregnancies the medical board takes a long time in submitting its report rendering medical termination not possible the HC had ruled in October last year, that the medical board has to give an opinion within three days. Following the ruling, the health department issued instructions to all civil surgeons in the state.

"I am happy at the children's home (in Gurugram) as I am getting food on time. I am being provided new clothes too. I want to study further and want to become a teacher," says Radha, during her counselling session. She has joined a school and has been taking classes online.

Unaware of crime with her, she sometimes presses for the release of her father. "Radha's case set the precedent. We prefer abortions in case of child pregnancies born out of rape. The CWC of the concerned district has to pursue the case for abortion after taking consent. What is the future of a child born after sexual assault by a father or brother or cousin? We

want CWCs and doctors to be sensitive to such cases. If the abortion is not carried out on time, then we prefer newly-born children to be surrendered and offer them in adoptions," said Baidya.

Chandigarh-based gynaecologist Dr. Nirja Chawla said, "Teenage bodies are not fit to bear pregnancy. Maternal mortality is high in them. They face a high risk of eclampsia, uterine infection, and diabetes. The biggest impact is psychological as a child is having a child."

Ironically, the state is yet to set up medical boards for implementing the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021, under which the pregnancy can be aborted up to 24 weeks instead of 20.

Upasana Sachdeva, a Gurugram CWC member, said, "The cases of child pregnancies are on the rise. Such victims hardly know the difference between good touch and bad touch. They require multiple counselling sessions and follow-ups for mental wellbeing."

Elopement Of Minor Girls On The Rise In Haryana

Bhartesh Singh Thakur

11 September 2021, The Tribune

For about three years, Meetu (name changed) has been waiting at a child care institution (CCI) in Sonapat to turn 18 years of age and get married to her lover. The boy is from a different caste, so they had eloped. Later, the police found them after the girls' parents complained.

The boy was arrested for "abducting" a minor as per law. Meetu was sent to a CCI as she refused to go with her parents.

Presently, the boy is out on bail. Coming November, Meetu would turn 18, the legal age for a girl to get married. "During these three years, we could only meet during hearings of his trial. I will marry him. He too has promised to marry me," she says, in a feeble voice, during her counselling session.

The CCIs forbid all kinds of communication between a runaway girl and her lover. "Once a boy flees with a minor girl, the police rescue the girl on the parents' complaint. Usually, the boy faces a case for abduction, procurement of minor or rape too if the girl reports about sexual intercourse or there is evidence like pregnancy. He could get life imprisonment too," said advocate Manbir Rathi, who deals in such cases. "The police rescued the girls following the registration of an FIR of kidnapping. And if she is a minor, the POCSO Act is invoked in the FIR based on the allegations contained in the complaint," said ADGP, Crime Against Women, Kala Ramachandran.

As per the police data, there were 360 cases of abduction of minor girls in 2019 with rape, which comes to 30 per month. Faridabad with 49 cases and Gurugram with 44 lead among the districts. Such cases rose by 4.7 per cent to 377 (31.4 per month) in 2020 despite it being the Covid year. Again, Faridabad (49) and Gurugram (38) reported the maximum cases. Till July this year, 269 such cases have been registered, with 38.4 incidents per month. Faridabad (25) leads, followed by Hisar (22).

Earlier, the age of consent was 16 years under Section 375 of the IPC. But the POCSO Act, 2012, and the criminal law amendment in 2013 enhanced it to 18 years. "More and more runaway minor girls in Haryana are opting to stay at shelter homes rather than going back to their parents after the police rescue them. They fear being ostracised and could face violence too," said Chairperson, Haryana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (HSCPCR), Jyoti Baidia.

According to HSCPCR, in 2019 and 2020 (data maintained jointly for two years), there were 491 runaway minor girls (20.5 per month) who initially refused to go with their parents. This year, till July 31, there were 303 such minor girls, which comes to 43.3 per month. The highest number of cases this year were reported at Karnal CCIs (66), followed by Panipat (57).

At a Gurugram CCI, Rani (17) (name changed), who is five-month pregnant, is waiting for June next year to turn 18. Her 21-year-old boyfriend is in jail. "I didn't go with my parents as they were pressing for an abortion. Next year in June, I will turn 18 and will marry him," she says during her counselling.

"The boys have to suffer in jail. There are cases where in cases of pregnant girls, both families get ready for marriage but there is no escape for the boy from the law," said Upasana Sachadeva, member, Child Welfare Committee, Gurugram.

Sexual Abuse Cases In Marriages On The Rise In Haryana

Bhartesh Singh Thakur

3 October 2021, The Tribune

A 31-year-old woman of Gohana (Sonapat) registered an FIR against her husband in June, alleging that he had unnatural sex with her. She said her husband used to abuse her in an inebriated state and when she resisted, he resorted to violence. She also accused her husband of raping her. Since marital rape is not recognised under the law, the police registered a case of unnatural act of sex under Section 377 of the IPC in this case.

The maximum punishment under Section 377 for carnal intercourse against the order of nature is life imprisonment or a term up to 10 years.

Laws blurry on marital rape

Sadly, laws are blurry on the subject of marital rape. I believe that enforcing something in the name of marriage or patriarchy cannot be justified by any standards. Discourse needs to be initiated on it. —Preeti Bhardwaj Dalal, Acting chairperson, Haryana state commission for women.

Porn changing sexual behaviour

Pornography is changing the sexual behaviour of couples. Initially, they do it as an adventure. Later, in matrimonial disputes, women make allegations of unnatural acts. — Nitin Sood, Advocate

In February this year, a 36-year-old woman also got an FIR registered against her husband under Section 377 at Women Police Station Ballabgarh (Faridabad), alleging that her husband was an addict and not only he used to rape her but also performed unnatural acts several times.

Such cases are not stray ones. A rise has been witnessed in the state in the cases where women are alleging unnatural sex by husbands. These cases also involve Section 498A of the IPC (subjecting women to cruelty).

The Haryana Police's record says that in 2018, there were 544 cases of matrimonial disputes, where women alleged acts of unnatural sex by husbands. Faridabad reported the maximum cases at 90, followed by 89 in Sonapat and 55 in Panipat. These comprised 13.1 per cent of the total matrimonial disputes (4,154) in the state.

In 2019, cases of unnatural sex rose by 18.4 per cent to 644. The maximum cases were reported from Faridabad (146), followed by Sonapat (99) and Panipat (56). These cases comprised 13.2 percent of matrimonial disputes (4,867). In 2020, there were 611 cases of unnatural sex reported. They formed 14.8 percent of the total matrimonial dispute cases (4,122), a rise from previous years. Faridabad (104), Sonapat (81), and Yamunanagar (48) topped the chart.

Till April this year, 284 incidents of unnatural sex were registered with Sonapat reporting the highest at 56, followed by Faridabad (37) and Jhajjar (26). The percentage of such cases in matrimonial disputes (1,730) rose to 16.4 per cent this year. In August this year, the Chhattisgarh High Court ruled that forced sex with wife doesn't amount to rape but underlined that "unnatural" sex with one's wife is an offence. The Kerala High Court judgment of July, on the other hand, described marital rape as physical and mental cruelty and a ground for divorce. The Gujarat High Court in Nimeshbhai Bharatbhai Desai case in 2018 had commented: "Husbands need to be reminded that marriage is not a license to forcibly rape their wives. A husband does not own his wife's body by reason of marriage." The Justice JS Verma Committee, formed after the Delhi gangrape in 2012, also called for recognising marital rape as an offence.

The Haryana State Commission for Women (HSCW) receives hundreds of complaints of marital rape and unnatural act by husbands. Acting chairperson of the committee Preeti Bhardwaj Dalal said: "Sadly, laws are blurry on the subject of marital rape. I believe that enforcing something in the name of marriage or patriarchy cannot be justified by any standards. Discourse needs to be initiated on it."

However, police records say that Section 377 was dropped from 70 cases in 2018, 69 in 2019, 109 in 2020, and 19 this year (till April) for lack of evidence. "Most matrimonial complaints have Section 377 but some cases are found false too," said SP Sonipat Jashandeep Randhawa.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, identifies sexual abuse, but no case was registered in Haryana in 2020 while only two were filed in 2019.

Malini (28) and Vijay (38) (both names changed) got married 10 years ago. In 2014, Malini joined a nursing course. Later, Vijay became an addict to alcohol and started raping her. He violated her whenever she returned from the nursing hostel. A mother of a 9-year-old boy, she was not even spared during her periods.

When she complained, she was beaten up. "I complained to my in-laws and my parents but in vain. He used to make false allegations of an extramarital affair. Even during my pregnancy in 2019, he raped me," said Malini, in her complaint filed in April this year before Haryana's Women and Child Development Department. Both have got separated now after the Haryana Women Helpline intervened.

In July, a Gurugram woman, Gurnaaz (name changed), complained to the Helpline that she was being subjected to unnatural sex by her husband. Once, her husband brought his friend too for group sex, she said. The counsellors helped her in getting separated from her husband.

The Women Helpline has been dealing with such cases and many such cases are referred to one-stop centres at the district-level, where there is a provision of one-to-one counselling of husband and wife along with legal guidance. In the past two years, the centres have dealt with 76 complaints of sexual abuse within marriage on reference from the Women Helpline (data available jointly for two years). Faridabad alone contributed 29 complaints.

"Addiction to alcohol, drugs and pornography has amplified the problem of sexual abuse within a marriage," said Women Helpline manager Preeti Phogat. "Women are conscious that it is wrong, but continue to sustain the abuse because of children and societal pressure," she added. "When an abused woman tells her mother about rape by husband, she is told it is part of a marriage. A woman who has had a love marriage against her parents' wishes is not able to go back to her family," she added.

Recently, Phogat handled a case of a couple working in an MNC in Gurugram as software engineers. "On the woman's complaint of rape by husband, we tried to talk to the latter. He said it happens in marriages. It was normal to him. He thinks he owns his wife's body," said Phogat.

A complaint of sex addiction also came where a mason in Jhajjar used to rape his wife every day. The couple used to live in a small house with three children, their eldest daughter aged 14. The woman complained that her husband doesn't bother even about grown-up kids.

In the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) too, Haryana topped the chart in north India with 8.4 per cent women facing spousal sexual violence, followed by Delhi (5.9 per cent) and Chandigarh (4.7 per cent)

“Wherever there is physical abuse, most of the time there is sexual abuse too. When we counsel, it has an impact for some time. But then husbands return to their old habits,” said Monica Bhardwaj, a call attendant at the Women Helpline.

Prof. Sandeep Grover of the psychiatry department, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, who too has dealt with such cases, opined, “It is more to do with sexual liberation that people want to experiment. Some women are ok with it, some are not. There is a conflict of traditional values with sexual liberation.”

He added, “Pornography is changing sexual behaviour but there is no one-to-one correlation with sexual abuse as it was there earlier too.” Gynaecologist Dr. Neerja Chawla, who had handled cases of sexual abuse within marriage, said women continue to sustain abuse and suffer pain as they wanted to continue with the marriage.

“Sexual abuse is an outcome of other forms of abuse like mental and physical abuse. Men exerting marital control end up abusing wives,” she said.

Ghoonghat Continues To Limit Women's Autonomy In Haryana

Poorvi Gupta

3 September 2021, yourstory.com/yourstory



The ghonghat continues to bar women, especially in the Hindi-speaking rural belt of the country, from making progress.

“I felt suffocated under the ghonghat (veil). But he would fight with me and force me to draw the veil when in front of my mother-in-law or any other member of the family,” says Shushma Bhadu Bishnoi about her husband, Bhagwan Das Bishnoi.

Embedded in a patriarchal tradition, the ghonghat or the purdah system can be traced back to the Vedic period in India. A tool of oppression, the ghonghat has kept upper-class women in seclusion and away from the eyes of men. Today, while times have changed and women have fought and dismantled this discriminatory system to a large extent, the ghonghat continues to bar women, especially in the Hindi-speaking rural belt of the country, from making progress.

Forty-year-old Shushma got married at the age of 18 and came to her marital home in the late '90s. Since then, for over a decade she was compelled to keep a ghonghat — one of the many visual signifiers of marital status among certain communities of Hindu women in India. While the ghonghat tradition may have been wiped out in most parts of the country, it is still alive and thriving in Haryana.

“If I didn't keep the veil, my husband would snap at me. He would say that the ghonghat is our tradition, how could I resist it? We had several tiffs around it over the years,” recounts Shushma, who belongs to a zamindar family in the village.

In 2010, Shushma became the first female Sarpanch of Dhani Miyankhan — a hamlet in Fatehabad district, Haryana. It was for the first time that a Sarpanch was to be elected from her village and the state mandate was that it had to be a woman Sarpanch. After becoming the village Sarpanch, Shushma had to meet people outside the four walls of her house and address meetings, all this while keeping the veil.

Lifting the veil

“My husband was worried about me lifting the veil, but he supported me in my decision to contest for Sarpanch election as everyone rooted for me,” she recalled adding that only after it started to create issues as she had to visit offices in Fatehabad and meet officials,

did her husband allow her to lift the veil outside the house. "I thought lifting my veil outside but drawing it at home was more problematic, so I told him either I'll lift my veil forever or I won't participate in any of the Panchayat activities," Shushma resolved and won the fight over breaking the ghoonghat system first in her own house and then in her village.

In 2012, she convened a Maha Panchayat of 25 villages in her village government school compound where all the women assembled and pledged to lift the veil once and for all. "At that time everyone lifted their veil but if women went back to draw their veils again, I can't guarantee that. Initially, the men in the village got really upset. They even abused the women in their houses." Nirmala Devi, 39, also lifted her veil for the first time at the Maha Panchayat. "

When the Sarpanch of the village made us pledge to lift the veil, we all did. While things have changed since, I still have to keep the veil in front of the older men in the family and the husband of my daughters. I won't lie. It is a long-standing tradition so it's difficult to forego it completely," says Nirmala.

"Honor is in the eyes of the people, not the veil. Women can go around the village without hiding their faces, but men need to have respect for the women in their own eyes," Shushma added. While Shushma's efforts brought some change in Dhani Miyankhan, almost a decade later, the ghoonghat system is still alive.

Conditioned to cover the head

Just a few blocks down in the village, there was a procession happening to honor the Gau Mata ('Holy cow') where many women had their faces completely covered with their dupatta. One of them, Tona Devi, 43, told us, "I don't know what life looks like without the veil. It has become a way of life and a way of respecting the older people in the village. I can't roam around in the village without the veil."

Older women say that the tradition will die with them and that they don't encourage their daughters or daughters-in-law to follow suit. But reality shows a different picture. Monika Bishnoi, 25, a young woman married in the village keeps the veil in front of her father-in-law and other men in the family. She, however, says that she can wear a top and a pyjama at night when everyone's asleep — a sign of modernity for her.

"I don't like it, but I can't do much about it. I must keep the veil. I feel shy in front of my father-in-law. Although I got married without a veil, after coming here, I have always kept it," says Monika.

With the ghoonghat system being passed down from generation to generation, it sees no end soon. Apart from deterring women from living with freedom, it also perpetuates the notion that if women are veil-free then crimes like eve-teasing, street harassment are justified in villages. Today, when we speak of how victim-shaming — in cases where women are blamed for their clothes in sexual harassment crimes — has only worsened women's lives and put the cause of women empowerment several steps back, the ghoonghat system has done no good.

How long before the ghoonghat system dies?

Despite women like Shushma and many others taking strong steps to curtail the veil, it continues unabashedly in the villages. And when state governments propagate such regressive traditions, it only further legitimizes the practice. In 2017, the Haryana government issued an advertisement in *Krishi Samvad*, a government-owned magazine, depicting the practice of ghoonghat with the caption — "Ghoonghat ki aan-baan, mhara Haryana ki pehchan" (Pride of the veil is the identity of my Haryana).

Preeti Bhardwaj, officiating chairperson of the Haryana Commission for Women, weighs in on it and says, "It is a paradoxical situation between the cities and the villages of Haryana. Women, who are from the interiors but have stepped out and gone to the cities, have

changed and no longer keep the veil. There are also several women Sarpanch who have lifted the veil and showed an exemplary spirit to the entire village but then there are women who are happy being under the veil also and that includes educated women as well. Women tend to live by customs and traditions that have been going on for generations and they don't mind it."

Bhardwaj adds that women in Haryana aren't forced to keep the veil. While it may be true for some, most women are conditioned to keep the veil and don't know otherwise. There is also a huge risk of being ostracized and mocked at by the community in the village that scares the majority of the veiled women from lifting it.

Rajbala Kataria, joint director of the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) in the Haryana Women and Child Development Department, agrees that the ghoonghat system is here to stay in the villages of Haryana. "It has been wiped out from the cities and among the educated class, but it exists even today in villages. However, we have seen a change over time where women don't keep the veil in the house but draw it once they are out of their homes," says Kataria.

Vaillo Bibah Ek Samajik Byadhi (Child Marriage – A Social Evil)

Jahida Parbin

20 April 2021, Dainik Gana Adhikar

A shocking incident occurred at Mandia under Baghbar police station in Assam's Barpeta district. Noor Mohammad, a 72-year-old so-called faith leader from Mandia, was able to secretly marry a 15-year-old girl with the help of his followers. In addition, Noor Mohammad tempted the child's parents with gifts of property and a shop in exchange for the child's marriage. The girl's parents were daily wage earners, so they became financially strapped as they did not have a job due to the COVID-19 lockdown. They were, thus, compelled to marry off their immature girl child. Having learnt this, a prominent local child rights activist Rafiqul Islam, collaborated with Bheraldi Rural Development Association and Madhya Gahepam Tiger Club and complained with the Additional Deputy Commissioner. After that, Bheraldi Rural Development Association and Madhya Gahepam, Tiger Club rescued the victim child in legal procedure with the help of district administration.

Prominent social activist Rafiqul Islam said that child marriage deprives a girl child of her rights. Although he mentions poverty as one of the main reasons for this, he cites several other factors such as education, religious opinion, etc. Islam also says that the guardians have become economically broke after lockdown, and whatever they had to spare is used up during the lockdown. So, the parents plan to marry off the daughters because the education or other maintenance of the girl child would be challenging for them. Parents who suffer from such uncertainty are more likely to experience abhorrent incidents such as child marriage. "Religion fraudulence, greed, privacy, compulsion, etc. are some other reasons why child marriages take place. There are hundred other incidents of child marriage happening without restriction and, so, new incidents are difficult to curb," he said.

Based on his six-year career as a child rights activist, he says, "Some communities that are more prone to child marriage are more likely to be marginalized - economically, politically, geographically and socio-ethnically. And so they are backward in education and culture. Child marriages are more likely to occur in communities that are deprived of social and political benefits." He has intervened in about a thousand incidents of child marriage. Most of these marriages are successfully prevented. Breaking the ice, he lodged FIR with police on his own, if necessary, against marrying parties involving children in various police stations of Barpeta district. This brave up-and-coming young man is constantly trying to prevent child marriage and create a stir in society against evil.

Mufti Nasir Rahman Kashimi, a prominent social activist from Mangaldai in Assam's Darang district, has launched a campaign against child marriage. He is the president of Assam Swacch Maulana Group (NGO), from which he starts study on child marriage and receives a lot of information. In relation to child marriage, Mufti Rahman Kashimi said, "Lockdown has incoherently affected in Assam along with the whole of India. Child marriage incidents have been seen in various places of Assam. A miserable situation has arisen among guardians due to job loss and difficulty finding a new source of earning. As a result, they have lost orientation and taken measures like child marriage.

This is a great way to get acquainted (gain, obtain, and retain) with people you know and love. It's a great way to get familiar (gain, obtain, and retain). Already able to collect a lot of data. In fact, due to the lockdown, schools and Madrassas were closed, and the girls could not go to school. And all the students and parents have forgotten their goals. There is no problem as long as schooling is on. As schools are closed, the girls are sitting at home, and parents take the chance of marrying them off, causing rise to child marriage.

The Maulana, therefore, starts researching child marriage through Assam Sweacch Maulana Group and has already been able to gather a lot of information. After that, with the help of local people, he managed to prevent child marriages and started campaigns to enhance

awareness. Through awareness programs, online meetings, etc., he has sensitised society to stop child marriage in general.

And in many areas, schools are closed due to lockdown. In this context, it has become possible for unwanted child marriage to take place. The online education process has also been responsible for child marriage. Young girls and boys are using mobile phones. They are unable to choose the right path and misuse the mobile phone. He says that if an average is taken, it will be found that child marriages increased during the lockdown compared to other times. Maulana Nasheer Rahman Kashmiri has been working through the Global Interfaith Voice Alliance (GIWA), UNICEF, etc., to prevent child marriage.

He has recently conducted child marriage and menstrual hygiene programs with ASHA Supervisors, ASHA Workers, students, and some learned women. He said he was continuing his efforts to prevent child marriage by spreading awareness meetings, education, etc.

Mufti Rahman Nashihur Rahman Kashmiri has thus created awareness in the society to prevent child marriage and has been able to stop many child marriages. He has been amply successful taken various steps to check such incidents. He is an enterprising social worker. He has continued his efforts to stop child marriage and has prevented many child marriages.

Child marriage is a social ill. For centuries, this issue has deprived women of their rights and hindered their development. The parents faced various difficulties as the schools remained closed due to Covid-19. Among these, many parents are encircled by complex processes regarding girl child. There are several parents who, after enrolling children in a school, received some financial support from the school for the provision of lunch. But they were surrounded by multiple inconveniences due to the lockdown.

On the other hand, introducing the online education system has created a problem for students of many governments and non-government institutions. This is because thousands of students are deprived of online education because of the miserable financial situation. Moreover, all these parents cannot lead an everyday life due to their poor financial condition.

On the other hand, smartphones are required for online education. All these parents have to spend their days amid severe financial hardship, so they cannot afford the money they need to buy a smartphone. In this way, the parents are forced to marry off their daughters. Again, many parents don't feel secure while their daughters work alone at home all the while. Therefore, many parents think it safe to marry their daughters when they can neither send them to school nor leave home alone.

Lockdowns in various parts of Assam and floods have led to increased child marriages. Although the floods affect many areas of Assam, certain regions like Jadavpur, Bamundangra, Rahampur, Kanchanpur, Satrakanara and some other char (sandbar) areas skirted by the Brahmaputra and Beki rivers are severely affected. Every year the inhabitants, especially the Muslims, lose their land, farms or homes in the floods, and the cycle of struggles continue. In this situation, families find it difficult to feed themselves. It becomes compulsory for them to marry off their daughters so that others in the family can have their meagre meals. Lockdown due to COVID-19 during the last year on the one hand and floods on the other rocked the sandbar areas of Assam. Incidents similar to these are taking place in different parts of Assam.

Abida Khatun, a recently retired headmistress of Champupara High School in Chaygaon of Assam's Kamarup district, said in this context that awareness meetings and rallies are conducted often by the schools to prevent child marriage. Ill-effects of child marriage are very often discussed with the guardians to know and protect their daughters from child marriage.

Mr. Ajay Kumar Burma, Headmaster, Duliajan Adarsh Balika Vidyapeeth of Duliajan in the upper part of Assam, conducts frequent awareness meetings and various programs to prevent child marriage. He also said that "child marriage is a violation of women's rights and an obstacle to the progress of society." He often meets with their parents personally to make them aware of the demerits of child marriage. He says, "To educate all the girls morally is one among multiple steps to be taken to prevent child marriage." In the past lockdown, one of his schoolgirls was caught in the act of child marriage. He involved himself and saved the child from the situation.

We all need to know about the dangers of child marriage. Some physical and mental consequences of child marriage are evident. Marriage causes considerable emotional damage to the girl child.

Dr. Nahid Suraiya Islam, an experienced psychiatrist from Guwahati, says in this regard, "In the case of girls, emotional development is not complete before the age of 18. The mental development of a girl is not complete till she reaches the age of 18 years. The development of personality is not complete. She is not in a position to adapt to the situation. Marriage imposes some social and cultural values on the girl child. She faces environments similar to domestic violence. She is not ready to be wife or mother emotionally or physically. Due to her incomplete development, she is not able to express her likes and dislikes and in this way her mental state deteriorates. If the husband does not provide any kind of emotional support to the child bride in such a situation, the child is likely to lose his mental equilibrium. It can also lead to anxiety or depression. "

This Guwahati based experienced psychiatrist, Dr. Nahid Suraiya Islam, talks about child marriage and says that "child marriage is a complete impediment to the mental development and therefore child marriage should never happen."

Child marriage is emotionally damaging and physically damaging to the child. In the case of child marriage, the most critical issue is physical harm to the girl child. In this context, an experienced gynaecologist and obstetrician of Guwahati, "A marriage of a person before the age of 18 are defined as child marriage. A child is not physically mature until they are 18 years old. Due to marriage, she is more likely to get pregnant at an early age, which can lead to anaemia and loss of body cells, causing a threat to life. Of course, not everyone will suffer the same fate in this regard.

A girl is not socially mature till she is 18 years old, and during this time, if the girl gets married and goes to a different house, she is trapped in a social bond, and everyone along with society exploits her. In this context, the parents do not take care of the daughters - in educating them, moulding their personalities. So besides shaping her as a good citizen, the parents sum up their responsibility to push her to a dark future.

After the marriage, a girl moves into a separate house, stays under the control of her mother-in-law and suffers from physical abuse by her husband. In addition to this, unaware of contraceptives and unable to take care of herself, she may get pregnant early and be a victim of a miscarriage, anaemia, high blood pressure. She may even die. Child marriage contributes to the increase in maternal and child mortality. Thus, child marriage can cause a lot of physical damage to a girl child. So child marriage is never suitable for a girl. "

Child marriage is a significant crime in the eyes of the law. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, has outlawed the practice of child marriage. This law wants to stop child marriage. It prohibits marriage between a girl under the age of 18 and a man under 21.

Child rights activist Rafiqul Islam says, "There are other ways to prevent child marriage, including making education compulsory up to class ten, implementing government schemes properly, and amending the existing laws on women. System has to be politically strong. The 'Village Level Child Protection Committee', to be set up under the Integrated Child Protection Scheme of India's Women and Child Development Ministry could play a

vital role in this regard."Government of India has enacted a number of important laws on child marriage", said child rights activist Rafiqul Islam.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, implemented from 10th January of 2007, is an essential act of the government of India to prohibit child marriage. Under section 2 (a), "child" means a person who, if a male, has not completed twenty-one years of age, and if a female, has not completed eighteen years of age. Section 2 (b) defines "child marriage" as a marriage to which either of the contracting parties is a child. Under Section 9 is a punishable offence for an adult male above 18 years of age to perform child marriage. According to Section 10, it is a punishable offence to conduct, serve, manage, direct, or promote child marriage. Finally, under Section 11, encouraging or allowing child marriage is a punishable offence.

The punishment for child marriage is as follows: Conviction under Section 9, 10 or 11 carries a penalty of 2 years' rigorous imprisonment or a fine of Rs. 1 lakh or both. According to the judgment of WP (CrI) No. 68/2008 dated 12.11.13 issued by the five-judge bench of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the police must register a case based on information on cognizable offence.

The offences under this Act under Section 15 are Cognizable Offense and Non-Bailable. According to Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, any citizen can file a complaint.

It is evident that all people, including the victims of covid lockdown and flood, become financially strapped, so struggling to support their children, they are forced to marry off their daughters prematurely. If we look into the matter, we find that specific causes behind child marriage. If these causes can be identified and addressed appropriately, the path to a better future for the girl child will be paved.

(Translated from Assamese to English)

Chinnari Pelli Kuthullu Akkuvaitunnaru (Child Brides Are On The Rise In The World)

Avula Yamuna

8 July 2021, V6 Velugu

కరోనా పర్భావం ఒకొక్కక్కరిపై ఒక్కొక్కలా పడింది. మరీ ముఖ్యంగా ఆడపిల్లలపై పర్భావం ఇంకొకటి ఉంది. అదెలాగుంటే.. ఆడిపాడాఅన్ వయసులో పెళ్ళిపీటలొక్కారు. పునత్కాలు మోయాఅన్ వయసులో మెటిట్టంటి బాధ్యుతఅన్ భు జానికెత్తుక్కునాన్రు వాళ్ళు ల్. ఊరూ వాడా అనే తేడాలొక్కండూ పర్పంచమంతటా ఇదే పరిసిథితి.

పర్పంచవాయిపత్ంగా పర్తి ఇదుగురు ఆడపిల్లలో ఒకరు పదెద్దిమిదేళ్ళకు ముందే పెళ్ళిపీటలు ఎక్కుక్తునాన్రు. మన దేశంలో ఏటా 15 లక్షల మంది అమామ్మిలకి చినన్ వయసులో పెళ్ళిళ్ళు ల్ అవుతు నాన్యని అంచనా. ఈ వాయిండెమిక్ వలల్ ఆ లొక్కలు మరింత పెరిగాయి. దానికి కారణాలంటంటి..

27 శాతం పెరిగాయి

వాయిండెమిక్కి ముందు గడిచిన పదేళ్ళలో పర్పంచంలో చైలడ్ మార్మరేజలు 15% తగ్గాయి. అంటే నలుగురిలో ఒకరి నుంచి ఇదుగురిలో ఒకరికి తగ్గి.. 2.5 కోట్ల మంది ఆడపిల్లలు చినన్ వయసులో పెళ్ళి నుంచి తప్పివ్వకునాన్రు. దాంతో వచ్చే పదేళ్ళలో చైలడ్ మార్మరేజలు సంఖ్య మరింత తగ్గుతుందనుకునాన్రు అంతా. కానీ, కరోనా ఆ అంచనాలనింటిని తారు మారు చేసింది. వాయిండెమిక్ వలల్ పర్పంచ వాయిపత్ంగానే కాదు మన తెలంగాణలోనూ బాల్య వివాహలు 27% పెరిగాయి. రానునన్ రోజులో ఈ లొక్కలు మరింత పెరుగుతాయంటునాన్రు ఎక్స్ పర్ట్స్.

పే దరికమే

బడి, కాలేజీల బాట పట్టాఅన్ ఆడపిల్లల పెళ్ళిళ్ళకి కారణం కరోనానే అంటోంది యూనిసెప్. కొవిడ్ వలల్ సిటీలో ఉవాధి కోల్పోయిన వాళ్ళంతా సొంతాళ్ళకి వెళ్ళారు. అక్కడ చేతిలో పనిలేదు.. తినడానికి తిండి లేదు. దాంతో రేపు ఎలా ఉంటుందోననన్ భయం పట్టుకుంది తలదండ్రులకి. మాకు ఏమనాన్ అయితే మా పిల్లల పరిసిథితేటనన్ ఆలోచనలు. దాంతో కూతుళ్ళ బాగోగుల గురించి ఆలోచించి చినన్ వయసులోనే పెళ్ళిపీటలొక్కేవారు.. దేశవాయిపత్ంగా జరిగిన చినాన్రుల వివాహాలలో 85 శాతం ఇలా జరుగుతునన్వే. పిల్లలు ఇంటిపట్టుటనే ఉంటే ఏమైనా అఘాయిత్యాలు జరుగుతాయే మో లేదా ఎవరితోనైనా పే ర్మలో పడితే ఇబబ్బందులు వనాత్తయే మో అనన్ భయాలు కూడా చైలడ్ మార్మరేజలకి కారణం అయ్యాయి. వాటాన్వలో ఎక్కువ సే పు ఛాట్ చేసుత్తందని.. ఫోన్ ఎక్కువ వాడుతుందని.. ఫలానా వాళ్ళతో చనువుగా ఉంటోందనన్ భయాలతో.. ఆడపిల్లల అత్తారీటికి పయిన తలదండ్రులు ఉనాన్రు. గార్మలో జరిగే చినాన్రుల వివాహుకి ఎక్కువగా ఇవే కారణాలు అవుతునాయి . అయితే కొందరు తలదండ్రులు ఎదురు కటాన్లు తినుకొని మరీ ఆడపిల్లలకు పెళ్ళిళ్ళు చేసుత్తనాన్రు.

ఆసరా

అప్పటికే మూడు పెళ్ళిళ్ళు అయిన వయకిత్కి 15 ఏండల్ అమామ్మితో పెళ్ళి కుడిరాచారు పెదదలు. మరో చోట 17 ఏండల్ అమామ్మికి పెళ్ళికి ముహూ రత్ంపె టాళ్ళరు మన తెలంగాణలో. పెళ్ళి కుడిరిన ఆ అమామ్మి అదదరికి చదువుకోవాలనుంది. కానీ, వాళ్ళ ఆరిథిక పరిసిథితు అన్ ఆసరాగా చేసుకుని కటన్ వదదనాన్రు అతింటివాళ్ళు.. పైగా పెళ్ళి ఖరచంతా తమదే అనాన్రు.. ఎదురు కటన్ మినాత్మనాన్రు. ఇంకేముంది.. ఆడపిల్లను భారంగా చూసే తలదండ్రులకి రూ వాయి ఖరుచ్ లొక్కపోవడంతో సంతోషంగా ఒప్పవకునాన్రు. ఈ రెండూ సందర్భాలలోనే కాదు మన దేశంలో చాలా వరకు చినాన్రుల వివాహు ఇలాంటి పరిసిథితులోనే జరుగుతునాయి.

చదువెందుకు?

ఎంత చదివినా అత్తగారింటోల్ బాసినుల్ తోమాలసందేగా? దానికి లక్షలు ఛోయడం ఎందుకు? ఆరిథికంగా బాగునన్ కుటుంబాలలోనూ ఇవే మాటలు. పెళ్ళి చేసి త్ ఓ భారం దిగిపోతుంది.. పైగా వెతుక్కుంటూ వచ్చిన సంబంధాని కాదనడం ఎందుకంటూ చదివినో సోత్మత ఉనాన్ మై నరల్కు పెళ్ళి చేశారు. ఈ వాయిండెమిక్ వలల్ ఇరవైనాలుగంటలూ పే రెంట్స్ కళ్ళ ముందే ఉంటునాన్రు పిల్లలు. పైగా సూక్ళ్ళు ల్ ఎప్పవ్డూ

తెరుచుకుంటాయో తెలియదు. దాంతో 'పెళ్ళి చేసే త్ ఓ పన్నెళ్ళాపాటి' అనుకుంటున్నారని మరీకొందరు పీ రెంటిస్. వాయిండెమిక్లో పిలల్లకు వివాహాలు పెరగడానికి ఇదీ ఒక కారణమే. మాయిలు రోజులో అయితే పెళ్ళి చేసే నా తమనన పువ్డు అమాయిలు నూకల్లో షిర్ండన్ లేదా టీచరల్తో విషయం చెప్పి సలహా అడుగుతారు. కానీ, ఇప్పవ్డు ఆ పరిస్థితి కూడా లేదు.

కఠిన చటాట్లు రావాలి..

పదేళ్ళ అమాయిని పెళ్ళి బారీనుంచి కాపాడడాంతో 2000 సంవత్సరంలో మొదలైంది మాతరుణి షెండేషన్. గవర్నమెంట్ నూకల్లో ఆడపిలల్లకి రీ షార్డకిట్వ్ హెల్త్, లైఫ్ సికల్స్ గురించి ట్రానినింగ్ ఇనుతనన పువ్డు పదేళ్ళ అమాయికి పెళ్ళి చేసుకొనరాని తెలిసి వాళ్ళ పీ రెంటిస్తో మాటాడతే చాలా నిరల్కమ్మంగా సమాధానమిచ్చారు. ఆ కమ్మణం అనిపించింది చినన్ వయసులో వివాహానికి బలవుతున్న ఆడ వాళ్ళ కోసం ఏదైనా చేయాలని. అపవటిన్ చి బాలయి వివాహాలపై షోరాడు తూనే ఉనాన్.. అయితే సరీవ్స్ నాట్ రట్ చేసిన కొత్తలో ఈ వివాహానికి రెండు నెలలు మాత్రమే జైలు శిక్ష ఉండేది. షోఅస్ సీ ట్షన్లో కనీసం ఎఫ్ఐఆర్ కూడా నమోదు చేసి వాళ్ళ కాదు. దాంతో 2004 లో నేషనల్ హూ యుమన్ రైట్స్ కమిషన్లో పబ్లిక్ ఇంటరసెట్ అటిగేషన్ కేసు పెటాట్. రానునన్ నెలలో జరగబోయే 60 పెళ్ళిళ్ళ డిటాలన్ ఇచ్చి ఆపమనాన్.. వాళ్ళ గవర్నమెంట్కి ఆరడరన్ ఇసీ త్ కేవలం ఏడెనిమిదే ఆగయి. దాంతో మళ్ళీ కమ్మెట్ ఇసీ త్ మానవ హక్కుల కమిషన్, మహిళా కమిషన్ మాతో కలిసింది. చటాట్లో మారువేతాలని గవర్నమెంట్కి లాటర్ రాసి, పారలమెంటరీ కమిటీ పెటిట్. అలా 2006 లో చినాన్ రులకు పెళ్ళిళ్ళ చేసే త్ రెండేళ్ళ జైలు శిక్ష, లకమ్ రూ వాయిల జరిమానాతో కొత్త చటాట్ వచ్చింది. చైలడ్ మార్మరేజీస్ ఆపడానికి విలేజ్ నాథ్ యిలో ఆఫీసరుల్.. అమాయి పెళ్ళి వద్దనుకుంటే వెంటనే విడాకులు ఇచ్చి మళ్ళీ పెళ్ళి చేసుకునే వరకు మనోవరిత్ ఇవాల్లని చటాట్ వచ్చింది. ఆ చటాట్కి మన రాషటర్ పర్ షుత్వం నుంచి రూలన్ రావడానికి మరో నాలుగేళ్ళ కోరుట్ చటాట్ తరిగాం.

ఇంత కష్టపడాడక కూడా ఎక్కడా చటాట్ కరెక్ట్గా అమలుకాలేదు. కానీ, పెళ్ళికి వచ్చిన బంధువులు, పురోహితుల మీద కూడా కేసు పెటాట్తో కాన్వెన్షన్ వనకిత్ తగాయి. తరావత యూనిసిఫ్, ఇతర ఎనీజ్ వోలు, బాలకా సంఘాలతో ఈ వివాహాలపై అవగాహన పెంచడం మొదలుపెటాట్. కానీ, ఈ వాయిండెమిక్ మాకషాట్ నన్ తా తుంగలో తొకేకసింది. మళ్ళీ ఇప్పవ్డు పరిగెడుతునాన్. బాలయి వివాహాల్నే గృహానిస ఎకుక్వగా జరుగుతోంది.. ఆతమ్హతయిలూ ఎకుక్వే. అందుకే వీటిని పూరిత్గా కటాట్ చేయాలంటే ఆడ పిలల్లు చదువుకునేలా షోర్ తస్విం చాలా. చదువుకునే పిలల్లకి పర్తి సంవత్సరం నాకల్ రిషివ్ ఇవాల్. కనీసం డిగ్రీ వరకు షిర్ ఎడు యి కేషన్ ఇసీ త్ ఈ పెళ్ళిళ్ళని కొంతలో కొంతైనా తగిగ్చగలం అంటోంది మమత.

వీళ్ళే బలవుతునాన్ రు

ఇదదరు ముగుగరు ఆడపిలల్లనన్ కుటుంబాల్లో చినాన్ రుల వివాహాలు ఎకుక్వగా జరుగుతునాయి. తల్లే లేదా తండీర్ చనిపోవడం కూడా చైలడ్ మార్మరేజీలకి కారణం అవుతుంది. అయితే ఈ పెళ్ళిళ్ళే ఎకుక్వగా దగ్గరీ బంధువులు, బాగా తెలిసిన వాళ్ళ, మేనరికపు సంబంధాల్లోనే జరుగుతునాయి. అలాగే సిటీలతో షోఅస్ త్ పలెట్టాళ్ళల్, గిరిజన తాండాలల్ ఎకుక్వగా ఈ వివాహాలు జరుగుతునాయి. వీటికి కారణం అవగాహన లోకపోవడమే అంటోంది విమెన్ అండ్ చిలడ్రన్ రైట్స్ యాకిట్విసెట్ మమతా రఘువీర్ ఆచంట.

పర్పంచలో చినాన్ రులకు ఎకుక్వగా పెళ్ళిళ్ళ జరుగుతున్న దేశాల్లో మనం నాలుగో నాథ్ నలో ఉంది. ఈ వాయిండెమిక్ ఇవ్టోల్ దేశానిన్ వీడకపోతే వాటి రేటు మరింత పెరుగుతుంది. వీటి నుంచి ఆడపిలల్లన్ కాపాడాలంటే జనాల్లో అవగాహన పెంచాలి. మరీ ముఖ్యంగా కూఆ, వయవనాయ పనులు చేసుకునే పీ డ కుటుంబానికి, పెదదగా చదువుకోని వాళ్ళకి ఈ వివాహాల వల్ల జరిగే నషాట్లన్ చెప్పాలి. కేవలం తల్లదండ్రు లకి కాదు మెనర్ అమాయిలకు కూడా వీటి వల్ల ఎలాంటి నషాట్ ఉంటుందో చెప్పాలి. వాళ్ళందరిలో అవేరెన్స్ కల్పిస్తే చైలడ్ మార్మరేజీలు కొంతైనా తగ్గితాయంటు తన ఎకస్ పేరియెన్ షిర్ చేసుకుంది మమత.

बाल विवाह : काल बनता कोरोना काल

विजय शर्मा

17 जुलाई 2021, दैनिक तरुण मित्र

दिल्ली में मयूर विहार इलाके के एक घर में काम करने वाली 40 साल की सलमा (बदला हुआ नाम) की शादी आज से 26 साल पहले हो गई थी। तब दिक्कत परवरिश के लिए पैसे की थी। लेकिन अब सलमा अपने पैर पर खड़ी है और किसी भी कीमत पर अपनी किशोर बेटी का बाल विवाह नहीं चाहती। वह उसे तालीम दिलवा रही है।

ऐसी कई कहानियां आम हैं जहां महिलाएं अपने ऊपर जो गुज़री उसे अपने बच्चों पर दोहराना नहीं चाहतीं। लेकिन यह सोच सिर्फ उन महिलाओं की है जिन्होंने खुद बाल विवाह की त्रासदी झेली। देश में ऐसे हज़ारों-लाखों लोग हैं जो इन स्थितियों से गुज़रे नहीं हैं और कम उम्र में बेटियों की शादी कर बैठते हैं। वजह कई है जिनमें निरक्षरता, गरीबी और ऋढ़िवाद प्रमुख है।

यूनीसेफ के आंकड़े बताते हैं कि दुनिया भर में आज जीवित करोड़ 65 करोड़ लड़कियों और महिलाओं का विवाह बचपन में हुआ था। इनमें से आधी संख्या बांग्लादेश, ब्राजील, इथियोपिया, भारत और नाइजीरिया में है। दुनिया की तीन में से एक 'बाल वधू' भारत में रहती है। देश में ज्यादातर बाल वधुएं पांच राज्यों में हैं यानि उत्तर प्रदेश, बिहार, पश्चिम बंगाल, महाराष्ट्र और मध्य प्रदेश। उत्तर भारत में बाल वधुओं की सबसे ज्यादा संख्या है।

बाल विवाह यानि 18 साल से कम उम्र में शादी। बाल विवाह बच्चों के अधिकारों का अतिक्रमण करता है जिससे उनपर हिंसा, शोषण और यौन शोषण का खतरा बना रहता है। बाल विवाह में औपचारिक विवाह तथा अनौपचारिक संबंध भी आते हैं, जहां 18 साल से कम उम्र के बच्चे एक शादीशुदा जोड़े की तरह रहते हैं। यह बच्चों की शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य और संरक्षण पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव डालता है। इसका सीधा असर न केवल लड़कियों पर, बल्कि उनके परिवार और समुदाय पर भी होता है।

लड़कियों-बच्चियों के लिए यह दुनिया पहले ही एक जोखिम भरी पनाहगाह रही है, वहीं कोरोना नामक कहर ने इसे और खतरनाक बना दिया है। महामारी के कारण दुनिया भर में लगभग चालीस लाख लोगों की मौत हो चुकी है और लगभग बारह करोड़ लोग गरीबी और भुखमरी में धकेल दिये गए हैं। लोगों के पास रोजगार नहीं है और ऑनलाइन कक्षाओं के लिए जरूरी इंटरनेट और स्मार्टफोन न होने से अधिसंख्य लड़कियां शिक्षा व्यवस्था से बाहर हो गई हैं। ऐसे में समय से पहले किशोर लड़कियों की शादी के साथ ही मानव तस्करी के मामले भी बढ़े हैं।

पहले से ही 'बोझ' समझे जाने वाली बच्चियों की शादी कहीं आर्थिक नुकसान की भरपाई के तौर पर तो कहीं पढ़ाई के खर्च न जुटा पाने के नाम पर की गई। इस दौरान आमदनी के नुकसान ने सबसे कमज़ोर तबके, खासतौर पर लड़कियों और महिलाओं के जीवन में भूचाल ला दिया है। बचने के ज्यादातर रास्ते भी बंद हैं। महामारी की वजह से किसी आपात स्थिति में मदद के नेटवर्क जैसे मित्र, शिक्षक, स्वयंसेवक, प्रशासन और समुदाय के अन्य सदस्यों से सम्पर्क कम होने के कारण हालात जटिल हो गए।

यूनीसेफ की कार्यकारी निदेशक हेनरिटा एच. फोर के मुताबिक, "इस महामारी को एक साल हो गया है और लड़कियों और उनके परिवारों पर पड़ने वाले प्रभाव को कम करने के लिए तत्काल कदम उठाने की आवश्यकता है। स्कूलों को फिर से खोलकर, प्रभावी कानून और नीतियां लागू करके, स्वास्थ्य एवं सामाजिक सेवाओं तक पहुंच सुनिश्चित करके तथा परिवारों के लिए व्यापक सामाजिक सुरक्षा उपाय प्रदान करके हम बाल विवाह के जरिए एक लड़की से उसका बचपन छीने जाने के जोखिम को काफी कम कर सकते हैं।"

दिल्ली की एक सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता ज़ैनब जौहर बताती हैं कि "कोविड-19 का सबसे ज्यादा कहर हर उम्र की महिला ने झेला है। घरेलू हिंसा में भी महिलाएं और बच्चियां ही ज्यादा पिसती हैं। कई बच्चों, खासकर बच्चियों की पढ़ाई छुड़वा दी जा रही है या वह घर में ही डिजिटल डिवाइड की शिकार है। अगर थोड़ी बड़ी है तो समय से पहले शादी का दबाव है। कई परिवारों में आर्थिक तंगी से निजात पाने के लिए लड़की का 'सौदा' तक कर दिया जाता है।"

ज़ैनब की राय की तस्दीक सुर्खियां बन रहीं कई खबरें करती हैं। हाल ही में यूपी के मिर्जापुर में 38 साल के एक लड़के को 12-13 साल की बच्ची से शादी करते वक्त गिरफ्तार किया गया। यह 'सौदा' एक लाख रुपये में किया गया था। वहीं उन्नाव के सोहरामऊ में तो ऐसा भी मामला सामने आया जब एक बाल विवाह रूकवाने की प्रशासन की कोशिश के बीच तय तारीख से पहले मंदिर में चुपचाप लखनऊ में शादी करवा दी गई। बाद में इस मामले में 19 लोगों पर मुकदमा दर्ज हुआ। यूपी के ही हरदोई के माधौगंज के एक गांव में बाल विवाह की तैयारी की खबर पर परिजनों को समझाने पहुंची चाइल्ड लाइन टीम के साथ बदसलुकी की गई। बाद में पुलिस आने पर सारी तैयारी रूकवाई गई और अभिभावकों और बच्ची की काउंसलिंग की गई। इसी तरह भोपाल में कोरोना कर्फ्यू के बीच चुपचाप शादी करने का मामला आया था जिसे समय पर शिकायत मिलने के बाद रोक

दिया गया। यह ऐसे मामले हैं जो शिकायतों से प्रकाश में आ गये। सामने न आने वाले मामलों का आप अंदाज़ा लगा सकते हैं।

बात इतनी ही नहीं है क्योंकि आगे की राह और कठिन है। यूनीसेफ की एक नई रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक “अगले एक दशक में दुनिया भर में बाल विवाह में दस फीसद बढ़ोत्तरी का अनुमान है।” दरअसल, कोरोना ने बाल विवाह के विरुद्ध जारी वैश्विक अभियान को बड़ी चोट पहुंचाई है। इस रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक “दुनिया भर में स्कूलों के बंद होने से, आर्थिक सुस्ती और परिवार एवं बच्चों की सहायता सेवाओं में कमी के चलते 2030 तक एक करोड़ अतिरिक्त लड़कियां बाल विवाह के खतरे में होंगी। जबकि कोरोना संक्रमण के आने से पहले यह अनुमान अगले दस साल में ऐसी दस करोड़ शादियों का ही था।”

हमारे यहां बाल विवाह को रोकने के लिए ‘बाल विवाह निषेध अधिनियम, 2006’ सक्रिय है लेकिन यह कई मामलों में नाकाफी साबित हो रहा है। हालांकि भारत में हुई कुछ पहल जरूर सराही गई है, जिसमें बालिंग होने पर ही शादी करने पर आर्थिक मदद भी शामिल है। इसी तरह यूपी के श्रावस्ती में जिला प्रशासन ने ‘परिपक्व’ नाम का ऐसा सॉफ्टवेयर तैयार किया जिस पर कोई भी मोबाइल से घर बैठे अपना नाम-पता गुप्त रखकर बाल विवाह की शिकायत दर्ज कर सकता है। वहीं राजस्थान सरकार ने शादियों के निमंत्रण पत्रों (कार्ड) पर दुल्हा और दुल्हन के जन्म की तारीख लिखवाना अनिवार्य करने का आदेश दिया है। प्रिंटिंग प्रेस वालों से दोनों की आयु का एक प्रमाणपत्र अपने पास रखने को कहा गया है। इतना ही नहीं अब बाल विवाह में काम करने वाले हलवाई, बैंड-बाजे वाले व अन्य लोगों पर भी मुकदमा दर्ज होगा। उत्तर प्रदेश में भी बाल विवाह को रोकने और शिक्षा को बढ़ावा देने के लिए आर्थिक रूप से कमजोर परिवार को बेटी की शादी के लिए आर्थिक सहायता देने की पहल की गई है।

बाल विवाह एक जटिल समस्या जरूर है लेकिन सूझबूझ और ठोस कार्यनीति से अब भी बच्चियों को इस नरक से बचाया जा सकता है। इस अभियान में अब सरकार और स्वयंसेवी संस्थाओं को लड़कियों को सुरक्षित ढंग से फिर से स्कूल भेजने, किसी विशेष कौशल या हुनर में दक्षता हासिल करने मदद देने के साथ ही यौन और प्रजनन स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं को फिर से सजग और तत्पर बनाना होगा।

Streedhanakkola, 212 Maranangal, Prathikalaru (Dowry Murders: 212 deaths; Who Are The Culprits?)

Shafeeq Thamarassery
28 June 2021, Dool news

Within 13 years, Kerala has reported 212 deaths resulting from dowry harassment; who are the convicts? Why is the number of cases still high despite the stringent laws? A detailed investigation.

A manual labourer from Mavoor, Kozhikode, Ahamed, led a difficult life for years. Every day, out of the meagre amount he could earn, Ahmed would set aside a fixed sum towards the wedding expenses of his daughters. He had to spend all his life savings to organise a grand wedding ceremony for his eldest daughter Faseela. On top of his meagre savings, Ahmed raised more funds through debts and loans for the wedding. He even gifted 20 coins of gold as dowry for Faseela's in-laws. But, within days after their marriage, Faseela's husband, Jaisal and his family started demanding another five coins of gold.

Ahmed, dealing with severe financial struggles after the wedding ceremony, could not meet this new demand. He had to inform Jaisal's family that he could not arrange the gold, kickstarting Faseela's days of ordeal at her in-law's house. She had to face severe harassment and torture from her husband and mother-in-law. They even denied her food while she was pregnant. Finally, she had to yield to their threats and keep all her agony to herself.

Amidst all this, Jaisal began raising a ruckus by accusing Faseela of carrying someone else's child and not his. He continuously insulted and defamed Faseela in front of friends and relatives. Finally, Jaisal walked out of the relationship on the 38th day of their marriage, asserting Faseela was 'carrying someone else's child.'

Faseela could not stand the vicious questions by her relatives and acquaintances after returning to her parent's home. She was still aching from the scars of emotional harassment she had to face during the first days of her marriage. Jaisal and his family coerced Faseela to get an abortion, but she did not comply. Faseela gave birth to twins and proved that Jaisal was the father through a DNA test. However, Jaisal married another woman by then.

Faseela was a divorcee and a mother to two at a very young age. Yet, she struggles to push her life forward, constantly fighting mental trauma and financial constraints. Faseela is now moving courts to receive the compensation she deserves and the lawful alimony to meet her children's expenses. She further expresses her concern about finding a way to live ahead. Faseela says that the only reason she doesn't think about ending her life is her children, who are dependent on her. She believes that she had to go through all these agonies solely because Jaisal was eyeing only the money he would earn from this marriage. (Names are not real)

When dowry hits, It's a headline again.

Due to the frequent dowry deaths, dowry has become a hot topic of discussion in Kerala. As a result, dowry harassment and related deaths have flooded the news recently. Kerala woke up to a dowry death news from Sasthamkotta, Kollam, on 21st June 2021. 24-year-old Vismaya was found dead after being brutally assaulted by her husband Kiran Kumar, a Motor Vehicle Inspector. Vismaya's parents had handed over 100 over of gold, 1.20 acres of land, and a car as dowry to Kiran Kumar at the wedding.

It was reported that Kiran Kumar harassed Vismaya because he was not satisfied with the car gifted by her parents. Friends and family have alleged that Vismaya's death is a murder, not a suicide. Vismaya talked about her torture to her near and dear ones. Most of her messages spoke of the torment she was going through at her husband's house. She had even shared with them several pictures of her bruises from the physical assaults

she had faced. Vismaya was kicked in the face and beaten up. All these messages and evidence were released to the public after Vismaya's death. Kerala's social conscience was just about recovering from the shock of this incident when more similar events were reported from places like Vizhinjam in Thiruvananthapuram Vallikkunnam in Alappuzha.

24-year-old Archana was found dead with burn injuries in her rented house in Vizhinjam, while 19-year-old Suchithra was found hanging in her husband's house in Vallikkunnam. Another such event was a man who murdered his wife with a snakebite hit the headlines many days earlier. Sooraj from Anchal, Pathanamthitta, hired a venomous snake and let it loose on his wife Uthra, inducing a snakebite that took her life. Sooraj had extracted as much money and assets as possible through dowry and decided to commit the heinous crime when he realised he could earn nothing more from her.

In a similar case of dowry harassment, Unni, son of late cine actor Rajan P Dev, was arrested a few weeks back. Moreover, Unni's wife Priyanka had committed suicide at her house in Vembayam, Thiruvananthapuram. Vismaya, Archana and Suchithra's ill fate has raised the alarm regarding the social evil of dowry that is still prevalent, and discussions on the tragedies triggered by this malpractice have rigorously sprung up everywhere.

Statistics speak

According to the New Indian Express reports, Kerala police have recorded 212 deaths related to dowry in the last 13 years. Whereas, as per the criminal records of Kerala Police, the state has witnessed a total of 66 dowry deaths during the previous five years. Furthermore, official data states that 25 deaths were reported in 2016, 12 in 2017, 17 in 2018, and 6 in 2019 and 2020. At the same time, the number of harassment cases registered during this time is more than fifteen thousand. Moreover, within the first four months of 2021, 1080 cases were reported with husbands and in-laws as the accused.

As per the data from Kerala Police records, 74679 cases were registered concerning atrocities against women between 2016 January and 2021 April in Kerala. Of these, 15114 cases were registered in 2016, 14263 in 2017, 13643 in 2018, 14293 in 2019, 12659 in 2020 and 4707 till April 2021. Most of these cases were reported as assaults from husbands and relatives.

Atrocities against women

Crime	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021(Till April)
Rape/ molestation	1656	2003	2005	2076	1807	787
Sexual Harassment	4029	4413	4544	4579	4000	1331
Abduction	166	184	173	234	147	67
Harassment from husbands and relatives	3455	2856	2046	2991	2715	1080
Other Crimes	5455	4374	4397	3986	3529	1309
Total	15114	14263	13643	14293	12659	4707

Different cases get reported in the Women's Commission, including domestic violence, dowry harassment, atrocities against women. Among these, most of the cases belong to dowry harassment. Between January 2010 and 23rd June 2021, 1096 cases related to dowry have been reported to the Women's Commission.

During this time, a total of 8241 cases of atrocities against women were reported to the Women's Commission. These figures were apart from the 7775 cases of domestic violence and 495 cases of abuse by the husband. According to the Women's Commission records, most crimes against women are committed in southern Kerala, and the least number of crimes are reported from northern Kerala. In all the atrocities reported to the commission, the Thiruvananthapuram district stands first in most cases. The least cases were reported in Wayanad, closely followed by Kasaragod.

Cases reported to Women's Commission from 2020 till 23rd June 2021

District, Harassment against women, Dowry Harassment, Abuse by husband, Domestic Violence.

Thiruvananthapuram 2544 447 176 3476
Kollam 838 126 39 656
Pathanamthitta 388 33 19 257
Alappuzha 617 81 33 447
Kottayam 682 60 38 692
Idukki 369 35 13 249
Ernakulam 831 84 45 538
Thrissur 420 47 21 250
Palakkad 288 55 14 266
Malappuram 296 36 19 272
Kozhikode 385 44 30 266
Wayanad 126 20 4 101
Kannur 294 16 31 195
Kasaragod 163 12 13 110
Total 8241 1096 495 7775

A survey conducted collectively by the central Women and Child Development department and Rajagiri College has found that women between 20 and 40 years of age and from a middle-class, upper-middle-class background face dowry harassment the most in Kerala. The study also states that 78% of the victims are non-earning housewives, and these women are most often silenced since they depend on their husband's income for survival. It further notes an increase in the atrocities against women, as elucidated from a survey conducted in Kerala during the lockdown.

Statistics regarding victims of harassment

Aged between 20 and 40 years 80%
Unemployed wives 78%
Harassment faced in own home 92%
Women with qualifications equivalent to or higher than Plus Two 80%
Illiterate 5%
Women from nuclear families 66%
Those who have own home 85%
Households controlled by the husband 60%
Alcoholic husbands 76%

Unending cases of homicides

We often come across news reports on women who lose their lives in accidents within their households. These reports can be anything from 'found dead in a well' and 'burnt to death', to 'dead in a gas cylinder explosion' and 'died from electric shock'. Women's rights activist K Ajitha, founder of 'Anweshi', a social collective for women, opines that each of these news reports would have a brutally realistic story related to dowry harassment to tell. But, unfortunately, most of these stay hidden or go unnoticed.

K. Ajitha has been engaging in social work since the 1970s and has mainly focused on women's liberation movements since the 1980s. She has been involved directly and indirectly in hundreds of women's struggles during the past four decades. K. Ajitha states that in most of these atrocities against women that she has handled, dowry harassment was very evident.

"Once a lady was admitted to Kozhikode Medical College hospital with grave burn injuries. Her husband and in-laws had intentionally poured kerosene over her and set fire. But they threatened her before the police could reach and get her statement. Scared, she told the

police that it was just an accident. She succumbed to death soon after. However, she had revealed the truth to her brother before breathing her last. The brother contacted us, and we could provide them legal aid and all other possible support. The case was investigated later, and the in-laws were proved guilty. They were punished. This is just one incident that comes to my mind at once. I've had to engage with many similar events in my life", says K. Ajitha.

What happened to the Dowry Prohibition Act?

The Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted in India in 1961. According to the law, any exchange of money, wealth, or other property among the two parties in a marriage is a serious offence. The Dowry Prohibition Act was amended in 1984. The offenders are entitled to receive imprisonment for a period not less than five years or a fine of Rs.15000. The offence is non-bailable.

Six long decades have passed since the law was introduced. Yet, the atrocities against women are on the rise day by day. To ensure more protection for women, a new section 498(A) was incorporated in the Indian Penal Code in 1985. Prevention of Domestic Violence act, intended to curtail the atrocities faced by women and girl children within the households, is equally stringent in the country. However, data and records tell us that all these laws are nothing but a joke.

Writer and social activist CS Chandrika states that each family will have to come forward and act responsibly to ensure that the Dowry Prohibition Act is not violated. "It should not be in vain that the country has a strong women's act. This act is a result of the nationwide protests and legal demands put forth by the revolutionary women and women's organisations who have fiercely responded to the numerous deaths of women due to dowry harassment", says CS Chandrika.

P. Viji, a trade union activist who works among workers of the unorganised sectors, believes that the patriarchal attitude of the executive system is one primary reason why the laws enforced for women often go unprotected.

"It is deeply unfortunate that discussions relating to the dowry system come up only when women are brutally murdered. Many among our society still believe that our girl children are married off only to cook for the husband and to give birth to his kids. Some parents even boast about the amount of dowry they gifted to their daughter's in-laws. All these circumstances can be changed only if our girls realise that their goal for life should be financial and social self-sufficiency, not marriage", says P. Viji.

Is the women's commission a failed project?

Kerala women's commission was formed on 3rd March 1996, following the model set by the National Women's Commission, with a solid intention to enforce laws for the social betterment of women in Kerala and also for preventing crimes that are targeted at women. However, hundreds of cases are still waiting to be solved before the commission. The commission allegedly takes every case forward to off-the-court settlements instead of bringing the culprits before the law.

"In most of the cases, while we get equipped to move ahead with strong legal measures, the survivor or her relatives will approach us seeking a compromise with the other party. They often fear that the woman's life will be affected if they move legally. In such cases, we will be sometimes forced to go for settlement talks on humane grounds. This cannot be considered as dereliction of duty", says a member of the women's commission who does not wish to reveal their name.

A television programme aired by Manorama News with the former Women's Commission Chairperson MC Josephine was widely discussed on social media. A lady from Ernakulam had telephoned to the programme and tried to share a complaint with MC Josephine, to which the former chairperson responded rudely. The public criticised this and gave rise to

an intense hue and cry to remove her from the position. Eventually, the state government had to remove MC Josephine from the Women's Commission.

According to researcher and social activist Aswathy Senan, women who approach the commission have been facing such unpleasant experiences for ages now. However, it became a severe issue because the response occurred publicly in a channel programme. She further asks how many of us would have come forward to fight for justice if a complainant had shared such an experience she faced from the chairperson behind closed doors while in an examination.

"We consider the women's commission to be a supreme institution which is bound to safeguard women's rights and ensure justice. Unfortunately, even this institution is led by a patriarchal value system. Unattended cases pile up before the commission, some of them get washed away, and women are forced to withdraw their complaints all because this value system rules here", says Aswathy Senan.

When dowry tortures vulnerable families

In 2016, Velayudhan, a resident of Chevayur, Kozhikode, pawned the only asset he had to hold his daughter's wedding ceremony – 9 cents of land on which his house stands. He borrowed three lakhs from a bank with this land as a surety. For several months after his daughter's marriage, Velayudhan paid the bank regularly. In an unfortunate incident, Velayudhan fell and injured his leg badly. He had to take a break from his lottery selling job for a while. This resulted in the accumulation of paying dues with the bank.

Loan and its interest increased his debt every day until he realised that the sum was too big for him to handle. He informed the bank authorities that he could not repay this considerable sum, following which they confiscated and attached his property. Bank officials sealed the house. Velayudhan and his wife Sujatha did not have any other place to go. They spend the entire lockdown period on the verandah of this house amidst the threat of Covid.

When the government had instructed all citizens to stay indoors due to the lockdown, this elderly Dalit couple had to spend months on a verandah, facing many hardships, including heavy rains. Then, they had to overcome such testing times during the autumn of their lives, only for hefty loans to pay the dowry for their daughter's marriage.

V. C. Jenni, an Anti-Sarfaesi activist, has many similar stories to share. She has been actively involved with families pushed into the bottomless pits of debt by marriage and dowry expenses. Most of them even lost their homes and savings. For example, Jenni says that many families in Vypin, Cherai, and Fort Kochi in Ernakulam have lost their homes, falling prey to the Sarfaesi Act.

The dowry system lands these families into such misfortunes.

"Most of the commoners like manual labourers and workers end up taking loans from banking institutions or private financial firms solely because they need money to marry off their daughters. Their greatest ambition is to see their kids get married at any cost. So, these economically struggling families pawn their only asset, which is most probably their home, to get loans at high interest rates. Interest amounts slowly get accumulated on top of the debt, and these poor working-class families will eventually fail to make the monthly payment regularly. Following this, officials will confiscate their house and property. Each district in Kerala has many such families who have lost their houses and land after holding weddings for their daughters", says V. C. Jenni.

Dowry harassment – can the reasons be confined to financial interests?

Experts from the field of mental health evaluate that there might be many hidden reasons behind the alarming increase in dowry harassment, suspicions and murders. They assert that frequent harassment towards a wife is not just a case of poor demeanour but an issue of mental health that needs to be treated.

Dr. Leela, a mental health specialist and counsellor at a private hospital in Thrissur, observes that the commendable progress marked by women in Kerala's socio-economic and educational sector in the last few years. This has shaken the sense of dominance nurtured by men creating an inferiority complex in them.

"Boys who receive unnecessary privileges from childhood will eventually start believing that women are somehow inferior to them. They tend to consider women objects they can use, and are taught not to respect women at all. This leads them to a stage where they assault women physically and emotionally", says Dr. Varghese Punnoos, Head of the Department of Psychiatry, Kottayam Medical College, in a response provided to Deshabhimani.

The unwritten dowry law is prevalent equally in all social groups, irrespective of religion, caste and community. The existing laws and systems are incapable of preventing this social evil, which mainly affects socially backward, financially unstable communities the hardest. Every year, many girls take their own lives or are murdered. Most victims tend to tolerate all the oppressions and lead miserable lives. Our girls are struggling through their lives, nursing their bruised cheeks and shattered hearts.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had made strong statements regarding this issue in his press meet. " Do not forgive and tolerate. Never pass on such flawed visions and values to our children. We, as a society, should reform our marriage system. We should realise that marriage is not an occasion to exhibit the wealth of families. Parents should realise that this barbaric system of dowry transforms our girl children to mere commodities", says the Chief Minister.

The government has also pointed out that the proper action will be taken against people committing crimes against women. The Domestic Conflict Resolution Centre system works in every district to prevent atrocities against women. This is a system in which the victims can raise their complaints online, and respective district police heads can directly attend to these complaints through the web. The government has now issued instructions to implement this system effectively and immediately respond to the complaints received. Another online venture called 'Aparajitha' has been introduced to receive complaints regarding women's cybercrimes and find expert solutions.

(Translated from Malayalam to English)

Violence Against Women: A Reality That Goes Un-Or-Under-Reported, And Largely Unnoticed In Kashmir

Haroon Reshi

13 August 2021, Kashmir Images, Kashmir Uzma

On the evening of August 08, Laila Qureshi, a well-known psychologist and mental health counsellor in Srinagar, through social media platforms, sought financial help for a female victim of “domestic violence”, who according to Qureshi had been “brutally beaten” by her husband causing her “a miscarriage” some time ago. The husband allegedly threw her wife out of the house, and now she is living in a pathetic condition in a rented room. Earlier last month, Qureshi shared the ordeal of a woman on her Facebook wall who was beaten up and injured by her brother. She also shared a picture of a medical prescription from SMHS Hospital confirming injuries to the victim. Ironically, the woman from Srinagar’s downtown has already been subjected to alleged domestic violence by her in-laws, and now she lives at her parental home, where her brother beat her up.

“The information about such incidents, occurring in every part of the Valley, comes into our notice on a regular basis. I also get complaints about such incidents through social media platforms. Usually, I try to meet the victims in-person to ensure their situation doesn’t go out of control. In most cases, I do well to settle the matters by using counselling methods. However, sometimes cases of serious nature come to me and I immediately inform the police and other law-enforcing agencies about these cases,” Qureshi told ‘Kashmir Images’, adding that the incidence of domestic violence has risen in Kashmir, particularly since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic last year.

The situation in terms of domestic violence in the Valley can be gauged by the fact that several deaths, allegedly caused by the domestic violence, occurred in recent months. In early March this year, a 32-year-old woman, mother of two minor children, in Rampora village of north Kashmir’s Bandipora district, died by suicide. Her parental family accused her husband and in-laws of forcing the woman to kill herself. In addition, they claimed that the deceased was being constantly harassed for dowry by her in-laws.

On April 07, Raja Banoo, 54, succumbed to burn injuries in a Srinagar hospital. She was allegedly set on fire by her in-laws at Aakhoora Mattan of south Kashmir’s Anantnag district on March 25. As a result, she had suffered burn injuries on more than 50 per cent of her body. During her treatment in Srinagar’s SMHS Hospital, Banoo had recorded a video clip in which she accused her in-laws of assaulting her and setting her ablaze. This video went viral on social media platforms. Her kin claimed that the victim had been subjected to domestic violence since her marriage nine years ago.

A couple of days later, on April 10, a 32-year-old woman, a mother of two kids, ended her life by suicide in the same district. Police registered an FIR against her husband for abetment to suicide and domestic violence. Following the incident, the outraged relatives of the dead woman torched her in-laws’ house. They accused that the in-laws of the deceased, who was into the seventh year of her marriage, forced her to take this extreme step.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted by the Union Ministry of Health has revealed that 9.6 percent of women in the age group 18-49 experienced domestic violence in 2019-20. In addition, the report released last year states that most sexual harassment and domestic abuse cases occur in rural areas.

According to this survey, five per cent of rural women of age group 18-29 have experienced sexual violence at the age of 18, while 1.4 per cent of urban women have faced sexual violence at the age of 18. The latest data regarding the violence against women in Kashmir is not available yet. However, 3,069 cases, including rape, molestation, and domestic violence in Kashmir in 2019, have been reported by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

Women Helpline data, launched in October 2017 by the government, also suggests that crimes against women are a matter of routine in J&K. According to last year's data, as many as 992 cases, including 619 domestic violence cases, have been registered through this service only between April and September 2020.

Experts say that cases of domestic violence are under-reported in Kashmir. "We do not have any research-based data available here to gauge the actual situation about domestic violence. As per my understanding, most of the domestic violence cases are not reported here, mostly because of the social stigma attached to these incidents. The cases are also under-reported because of the traditional mindset of our woman folk. We traditionally feed our daughters that they are supposed to be tolerant to the excesses by their inlaws." Ezabir Ali, who works for women's rights in J&K, told 'Kashmir Images'. She says that J&K lacks a proper investigating mechanism and law enforcement in terms of the crimes against women. "Closure of the State Women Commission has added to the helplessness of already distressed women." Pertinently, the Jammu and Kashmir State Commission for Protection of Women and Child Rights (commonly known as Women's Commission) and six other commissions were closed down in J&K following the abrogation of Article 370 two years ago. "To establish a new commission here is indispensable. There were hundreds of cases related to the crimes against women pending in the commission when it was closed down. Government should restore the earlier commission here." Vasundhra Pathak Masoodi, a Supreme Court lawyer and the last person to head the J&K State Women's Commission before it was closed down post-August 05, 2019, told 'Kashmir Images'. She added, "It is a matter of discomfort to see how domestic violence cases are cropping up in Kashmir, which is otherwise a place where people are known for their high moral values.

"During my tenure as head of the Women's Commission, I came across many women who have been tortured and harassed, even burnt for dowry. Even at this time, I get complaints regarding domestic violence in the Valley through my personal contacts. The government needs to restore the commission here," says Masoodi. More than a year after the Women's Commission was closed down in J&K, the National Commission for Women (NCW) held a three-day public hearing of the cases, including domestic violence cases, in Srinagar on February 12-14 this year. After the event, Rekha Sharma, chairperson of NCW, told the media that she had not expected that there would be complaints about the dowry issues, which is one of the causes of domestic violence here.

Mir Suheel, a senior researcher at the University of Kashmir, who has plenty of case studies about domestic violence in Kashmir, believes that women are usually being treated and controlled like objects in Kashmir do not have souls and emotions.

"Womenfolk in Kashmir are continuously subjected to suppression. In many cases, they are not allowed to speak up or express their feelings and emotions. Due to the constant oppression, many women have even forgotten to complain or seek their rights. The taboos have been attached to their mental states to the extent that they have stopped speaking up," Mir told 'Kashmir Images'. He added, "Ours is a patriarchal society. It is almost always the women who are subjected to domestic violence, not only after their marriages but even before marriages at their parental homes. We have a large number of documented cases pointing to the horrible condition of the women in our society".

Jammu and Kashmir need a comprehensive policy to stop the incidence of domestic violence and protect womenfolk's rights. To prevent the rising crimes against women, the UT needs a suitable investigation mechanism and fast-track courts to ensure distressed women get justice.



WOMEN AND CHILDREN: RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS

For many years women have been fighting for their rights, addressing inequality and campaigning to change laws, even taking to the streets to demand their rights be respected. The media had given women space to speak up and be heard, encouraging solidarity and collecting shared experiences. However, they continue to be on the periphery of society as various indicators show. The pandemic undermined fundamental rights, and we must learn lessons from its impact on women to ensure that robust policies are put in place so that they are no longer marginalised.

This section highlights the plight of women, children and sexual minorities when denied fundamental rights. Puja Singh's article, 'माँ का दूध बच्चों का रक्षक कवच', depicts the importance of breastfeeding and its benefits to promote good health for both the child and the mother. The article highlights the poor ratio of breastfed children after birth in Jharkhand and its effects. Inderpreet Singh in his article, 'पंजाब शिक्षा विभाग की सराहनीय पहल, बदलेंगे बचेरों कचे बोल तो तंज-रंज सचे मुक्त होंगी बचेरियाँ', focuses on the steps taken by the Education Department of Punjab to change the mindset of the society toward gender sensitivity. Efforts are being made to bring about gender equality right from school to discourage the present and future generation girls from facing discrimination. Lessons on respecting women and gender balance are being introduced in school curricula.

The article, 'Gender Gap: Haryana Women Fall Behind In Vaccination Drive', written by Bhartesh Singh Thakur presents the stark reality of women falling behind men in getting vaccinated. States lagging are Haryana, Punjab, Delhi, J&K. However, on the positive side, states like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Puducherry, Chhattisgarh have recorded more women getting vaccinated as compared to men. Although the Union Cabinet in January 2020 allowed women the right to get an abortion as part of reproductive rights and gender justice, there remain some loopholes. In her article 'How The New Abortion Law Fails To Give Women Absolute Rights Over Their Bodies', Shahina KK discusses the law and how it hampers and interferes with the bodies of women. In addition, the law does not accommodate non-medical concerns over the economic costs of raising a child, effects on career decisions, or any other personal considerations.

Menstrual hygiene is yet another taboo topic that rarely gets written about in mainstream media. In her article, 'How Pad Bank Set Up By Allahabad University Students Is Helping Slum Residents Junk Rags', Jyoti Yadav presents the challenges women and girls in slums in the outskirts of Prayagraj face during menstruation. The poor economic situation led to the inability to spend on pads, forcing them to use cloth. The locals are also unaware of Jan Aushadhi centres providing pads at Re.1 apiece. Jyoti emphasises that periods are still a hush-hush topic, and menstrual education is still considered unnecessary. The Pad Bank is an initiative that provides free pads to needy women and girls. 'Thamizhagathil Athigarikum Kuzhanthai Thirumanagal: Pen Kuzhathaigal Paathukapil Tamizhagam Pinokki Selkiratha? (Is Tamil Nadu Lagging Behind In Girl Child Protection)', by Indumathy. G highlights the practices of child marriage. She notes that child marriages have increased by 40% during the pandemic in the villages and suburbs of Chennai and therefore preventing child marriages must become a necessary movement.

The translated article, 'Avallem Thakkuva (Women Can Run Home and Earn Money)' also written by Avula Yamuna focuses on women and finances and how men primarily dominate decision-making in the home. She notes that women are not involved in financial matters in many families despite consistently managing the household budgets. They can play an equal role in securing their family's future just like men. But their essential function is not recognized. The article focuses on the main question: When will we as a society learn to accept women as decision-makers?

According to 'The Mobile Gender Gap Report', 35% of active users in India are women. Priyanka Tupe's 'Where 'Digital India' Is Out Of Range' focuses on the widening gender gap in access to education during the pandemic. Girls are missing out on education because they can't access online and distance learning and are the first to be pulled out of school, put to work and care for younger siblings when families face economic hardship. Despite having good academic records, girls do not get support from their families. Digital education during the pandemic has worsened the disparity between boys and girls, forcing girls to leave their education. 'महिलाओं को आरक्षण नहीं, शिक्षा व सशक्तीकरण चाहिए, पंजाब कचे इन दो कचेसों नचेकिया साबित', written by Inderpreet Singh focuses on the need of women's education and empowerment which is the need of the hour rather than reservation. Even if women are elected based on reservation, they lag due to a lack of education. On the other hand, educated women have performed better than men. In the last article, 'In Search Of Freedom From Loitering To Uproot The Exploitation,' Priyanka Tupe, describes how children with the assistance of the NGO CORO are instrumental in bringing water and electricity to their village apart from starting an Anganwadi. The NGO also helped in mobilising the youth in breaking gender stereotypes by having boys perform tasks that were traditionally looked upon as roles for girls.

माँ का दूध बच्चों का रक्षा कवच

पूजा सिंह

2 अगस्त 2021, प्रभात खबर

माँ का दूध शिशु के लिए अमृत होता है। यह बच्चे को संक्रमण और कई तरह की बीमारियों से बचाता है। हालांकि, बदलती जीवनशैली और कामकाजी होने के कारण ज्यादातर महिलाओं को अपने बच्चों को स्तनपान कराने का समय ही नहीं मिल पाता। ऐसे में महिलाओं को जागरूक करने के उद्देश्य से हर साल 1 अगस्त से 7 अगस्त तक विश्व स्तनपान सप्ताह मनाया जाता है। ताकि हर माँ स्तनपान संबंधी जानकारी और इसके फायदे को समझ सके। स्तनपान की महत्ता व शिशुओं को मिलनेवाले लाभ के बारे में प्रस्तुत है पूजा सिंह @ रांची की यह रिपोर्ट....

कृत्रिम दूध पर मांओं की निर्भरता कम करने का दिया जाएगा जोर

विश्व स्तनपान सप्ताह पर राज्य में 1 से 7 अगस्त तक जागरूकता कार्यक्रम चलाया जा रहा है। इस दौरान माताओं को स्तनपान के महत्व के बारे में बताया जाएगा। एनएचएम के अभियान निदेशक ने सभी सिविल सर्जनों को निर्देश दिया है कि आईएमपीएस एक्ट का अनुपालन करते हुए डिब्बा बंद दूध, पाउडर दूध, दूध की बोतल और कृत्रिम दुध व निप्पल की बिक्री को बढ़ावा नहीं देने के लिए महिलाओं को जागरूक करें। वहीं धनबाद को छोड़कर राज्य के सभी जिलों में स्वीकृत ब्रेस्टफीडिंग कॉर्नर मातृछाया का संचालन होगा। स्तनपान सप्ताह के तहत चल रहे जागरूकता कार्यक्रम के लिए सोशल मीडिया जैसे व्हाट्सएप, ट्विटर और फेसबुक के अलावा पोस्टर आदि सभी माताओं को संदेश दिया जाएगा।

झारखंड में 6 माह के बच्चों के पोषण की स्थिति चिंताजनक

स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार मंत्रालय के व्यापक राष्ट्रीय पोषण सर्वेक्षण 2016-18 के अनुसार बच्चों को समय पर पूरक आहार नहीं मिलना झारखंड के लिए चिंता का सबसे बड़ा कारण है। यह पूरक आहार बच्चों को उसके जन्म से लेकर 6 महीने की आयु पूरी करने के बाद शुरू होना चाहिए। लेकिन झारखंड में 10 में सिर्फ एक बच्चे को इस आयु के अनुपात समुचित आहार मिलता है।

गैर आदिवासी समुदाय के मुकाबले आदिवासी समुदाय में हुआ मामूली सुधार

बच्चे के शुरुआती स्तनपान की स्थिति में गैर आदिवासी समुदाय की तुलना में आदिवासी समुदायों में मामूली सुधार ही हुआ है। स्तनपान की स्थिति, चाहे बच्चे का जन्म स्वास्थ्य केंद्रों में हुआ हो या घर पर सामान ही है। लगभग 72 प्रतिशत महिलाओं ने गर्भावस्था के दौरान स्तनपान के बारे में परामर्श प्राप्त किया।

स्तनपान करने वाली बच्चों को लाभ

- स्तनपान करने वाले बच्चों को सही मानसिक विकास होता है। सीखने की क्षमता बढ़ती है। मां से रिश्ता मजबूत होता है।
- कोविड-19 महामारी के दौरान स्तनपान करने वाले बच्चों के शरीर में रोगों से लड़ने की क्षमता भी बढ़ाती है।
- माँके दूध में सभी जरूरी पोषक तत्व होते हैं। आसानी से पच जाता है।
- माँ का दूध साफ-सुथरा व जीवाणु रहित होता है। जो शिशु को दस्त, निमोनिया व अन्य प्रकार के संक्रमण से बचाता है।
- माँ का दूध सही तापमान का होता है और शिशु को आवश्यकता होने पर हर समय सहज रूप से तैयार मिलता है।
- माँ का दूध शिशु को सांस और दमा की बीमारी, एलर्जी व त्वचा संबंधी रोगों से बचाता है।

स्तनपान कराने वाली मां को लाभ

- माँ का शरीर सुदौल बनता है। स्वास्थ्य बेहतर रहता है। अंडाशय व स्तन कैंसर का खतरा कम होता है।
- स्तनपान कराने से माँ का गर्भाशय तुरंत अपने पूर्ण अवस्था में आ जाता है और शरीर में खून की कमी नहीं रहती है।
- स्तनपान कराना परिवार को नियोजित रखने में और दोबारा गर्भधारण में देरी करने में मदद करता है।
- जन्म के तुरंत बाद और अधिक बार दूध पिलाने से माताओं को स्तनों में भारीपन की समस्या नहीं रहती।
- माँ सहज बेफिक्र और अधिक अधिक प्रसन्न रहती है। वह शिशु को तुरंत व सही तापमान का दूध पिला सकती है।
- पूर्ण स्तनपान कराने वाली माँ बच्चे के पालन पोषण व उनके व्यवहार से तालमेल बिठाने में सक्षम होती है।

स्तनपान कराने वाली माँ का आहार

- स्टार्चयुक्त भोजन: चावल, ब्रेड, पूर्ण अनाज से बनी रोटी, आलू, जई (ओट्स), सूजी और पास्ता।
- डेयरी उत्पाद: एक ग्लास दूध, घी, दही या योगर्ट।
- प्रोटीन के लिए: दाल- दलहन, अंडे, मछली और वसा रहित मांस, पर्याप्त मात्रा में फल और सब्जियां।
- स्नेक्स के तौर पर: मेथी, जीरा, सौंफ व गोंद के लड्डू और मेवे।
- अन्य सप्लीमेंट: आयरन, कैल्शियम, विटामिन ए, विटामिन सी और विटामिन डी।

झारखंड के परिपेक्ष में NFHS-4 (2015-16) के आंकड़े

- 72 प्रतिशत महिलाओं की जी काउंसलिंग हो पाती है स्तनपान को लेकर गर्भवस्था के दौरान।
 - 62 प्रतिशत प्रसव संस्थागत (स्वास्थ्य केंद्रों/ अस्पतालों) में होता है झारखंड में।
 - 33 प्रतिशत नवजातों को ही जन्म के एक घंटे के अंदर कराया जाता है स्तनपान।
 - 65 प्रतिशत बच्चों को ही जन्म के 6 माह तक कराया जाता है विशेष स्तनपान।
 - 10 में से केवल एक बच्चे को प्राप्त होता है पोषक एवं संतुलित आहार।
 - 2 महीने से कम उम्र के 80 प्रतिशत बच्चों को कराया जाता है विशेष स्तनपान।
 - 4 से 5 महीने की आयु में 50 प्रतिशत तक रह जाती है विशेष स्थान की दर।
- नोट: NFHS-3 (2005-06) की तुलना में इन आंकड़ों में केवल 10.7 प्रतिशत का ही सुधार हुआ है।

एक्सपर्ट की राय

स्तनपान कराने वाली माँ के शरीर को अपेक्षाकृत अधिक कैलोरी, विटामिन और मिनरल्स की जरूरत अधिक होती है। स्तनपान कराने वाली माताओं को कम से कम 3 बार नियमित खुराक और दो-तीन बार हल्की खुराक लेनी चाहिए। नाश्ते में फल, बादाम, वेज सैंडविच, फ्रूट सलाद इत्यादि लें। डाइटिंग से बचे। व्यायाम और मॉर्निंग वॉक जरूर करें- अर्पिता मिश्रा, डाइटिशियन

जन्म से लेकर अगले छह माह तक बच्चे के लिए माँ का दूध सर्वोत्तम आहार होता है। इससे बच्चों में डायरिया जैसी बीमारी का खतरा काफी कम हो जाता है। माँ के दूध में एंटीबायोजी उसे बचाया रखता है। It माँ के दूध में जितनी शक्ति होती वह किसी भारी चीज से पूरी नहीं की जा सकती। कोरोना काल से भी स्तनपान का कोई लेना देना नहीं होता है- डॉ. किरण चंदेल, स्त्री रोग विशेषज्ञ, सदर अस्पताल।

माँ का दूध बच्चों के लिए अमृत है। हर बच्चे को उसकी माँ का दूध जन्म के साथ ही मिलना चाहिए। माँ के शुरु में होने वाला पीला दूध बच्चे को इम्यूनिटी प्रदान करता है। जो किसी भी इन्फेक्शन से लड़ने में मदद करता है। माँ के दूध में प्रोटीन, विटामिन की प्रचुर मात्रा होती है, जो बच्चे के लिए जरूरी है। यह साफ और स्वच्छ होता है, जो न्यूट्रिशन देता है- डॉ. अर्चना कुजूर, बाल रोग विशेषज्ञ।

पंजाब शिक्षा विभाग की सराहनीय पहल, बदलेंगे बेटों के बोल तो तंज-रंज से मुक्त होंगी बेटियाँ

इंदरप्रीत सिंह

5 जुलाई 2021, दैनिक जागरण

पंजाब स्कूल शिक्षा विभाग के स्कूलों में बच्चों को महिलाओं के सम्मान का पाठ पढ़ाया जाएगा। शिक्षा विभाग ने लिंग संवेदनशीलता आधारित कार्यक्रम शुरू किया है। इसके लिए राज्य के 4500 अध्यापकों को प्रशिक्षित भी किया गया है।

‘बेटी, तुम क्या करोगी आगे पढ़कर... घर के कामकाज में अपनी मां का हाथ बंटाओ.. और फिर शादी के बाद भी तो तुम्हें ससुराल जाकर चूल्हा-चौका ही संभालना है। तुम्हारे भाई के एडमिशन के लिए ही साठ हजार रूपयों की जरूरत है। मुझसे तो वह भी नहीं हो पा रहा, तुम्हारी पढ़ाई के लिए तुम्हें कॉलेज की फीस कहां से दूंगा..।’

‘इसको सिलाई - कढ़ाई का काम सिखाओ, शादी के बाद यह ससुराल जाएगी तो सही सब इसके काम आएगा।’
‘बस तुम महिलाओं की भी न, अक्ल चोटी के पीछे ही होती है।’

ये सब ऐसे वाक्य हैं जो हम बचपन से ही गाहे बगाहे सुनते रहते आए हैं। यह जाने बगैर कि इन वाक्यों के एक-एक शब्द का छोटी बच्चियों पर क्या असर पड़ता है। बड़े होने पर वे इस मानसिकता की शिकार हो सकती हैं और उनमें आगे बढ़ने की संभावनाएं क्षीण हो सकती हैं।

गुजरते वक्त के साथ समाज में महिलाओं के प्रति सोच बदलने की बात तो तमाम मंचों पर होती है, मगर समाज का सच कुछ और ही है। आज भी कहीं न कहीं महिलाओं के प्रति समानता की सोच का अभाव है। सवाल उठता है कि आखिर हमारे आस पास, समाज में इस तरह के शब्दों का उपयोग क्यों होता है? इन शब्दों के उपयोग को कैसे रोका जा सकता है? उनमें बदलाव लाने के क्या तरीके हो सकते हैं?

इन सभी पर ध्यान देते हुए इस अकादमिक सत्र से पंजाब स्कूल शिक्षा विभाग ने एक एनजीओ ‘ब्रेक थ्रू’ के साथ मिलकर लिंग संवेदनशीलता आधारित एक कार्यक्रम शुरू किया है। वह यह कि छठी से आठवीं तक के अंग्रेजी, पंजाबी, सोशल साइंस आदि विषयों के पाठ्यक्रम में ही बदलाव

करके लड़कों को शुरू से ही लड़कियों के प्रति आदर भाव वाले शब्दों का इस्तेमाल करना सिखाया जाए। यह कहानियों के माध्यम से हो सकता है, लेख आदि के माध्यम से हो सकता है। एक्टिविटी के माध्यम से किया जा सकता है। इसके लिए 4500 अध्यापकों को प्रशिक्षित किया गया है। गर्मियों की छुट्टियों के बाद जैसे ही स्कूल खुलेंगे, प्रदेश के बच्चे इस नए पाठ्यक्रम से रुबरू होंगे।

आखिर इसकी जरूरत क्यों पड़ी? इस संबंध में स्कूल शिक्षा विभाग के सचिव कृष्ण कुमार का कहना है कि बच्चों की मानसिकता में बदलाव लाने का सबसे बड़ा हथियार या माध्यम शिक्षा ही है। खास तौर से बुनियादी स्तर पर इसकी पहल करने का प्रयास किया गया है। छोटी कक्षाओं के बच्चों को सही तरीके से सिखाया जाए तो इससे उनके व्यवहार में ही अंतर दिखाई देने लगेगा। कृष्ण कुमार इससे पहले लिंगानुपात व भ्रूण हत्या पर काम कर चुके हैं।

ब्रेकथ्रू की सीनियर डायरेक्टर सुनीता मेनन समाज की बदलती जरूरतों का विवरण देते हुए बताती हैं कि अब भी लड़कियों से पुरानी सामाजिक भूमिकाओं और अपेक्षाओं को पूरा करने की ही उम्मीद की जाती है। उनके व्यवहार में किसी भी तरह के विचलन का समाज और लड़कियों के परिवार द्वारा उनका विरोध किया जाता है। कई बार देखने में आया है कि इस तरह के व्यवहार से लड़कियों को अपनी शिक्षा बीच में ही छोड़नी पड़ती है या फिर अगर वह खेल में शामिल हैं तो लड़कियों के प्रति ‘सामाजिक-दृष्टिकोण’ के कारण उन्हें अपना खेल भी बीच में ही छोड़ना पड़ता है।

उन्होंने बताया कि ऐसे व्यवहार में बदलाव शिक्षा के जरिए ही लाया जा सकता है। पंजाब में इसे लागू करने के लिए ही छठी से आठवीं तक के पाठ्यक्रम को ऐसा बनाया गया है। इसे सरकार को मंजूरी के लिए भेज दिया गया है। इससे पहले कि स्कूल खुलें हम 280 मास्टर ट्रेनरों, 4500 अध्यापकों को प्रशिक्षित कर देंगे जो आगे 13 हजार अध्यापकों को प्रशिक्षित करेंगे।

शिक्षा विभाग में इंग्लिश के लेक्चरर के तौर पर काम कर रहे पुष्पेश कुमार मानते हैं कि लड़कियों को शिक्षा दिलाना गरीब अभिभावकों की प्राथमिकता में नहीं होता। बालमन में अगर हम अभी से लड़कों और लड़कियों के बीच समानता की बात डालेंगे तो बड़े होने पर उनका व्यवहार भी खुद ब खुद बदल जाएगा। सामाजिक बदलाव के लिए यह एक सार्थक प्रयास है।

Gender Gap: Haryana Women Fall Behind In Vaccination Drive

Bhartesh Singh Thakur

4 August 2020, The Tribune

Even as the share of women deaths in total Covid casualties jumped to 37.5 per cent in Haryana, their share in the vaccination remains smaller than men. From the start of the pandemic to March 31, there were 1,030 (32.6 percent) women deaths out of 3,155 total casualties. But the share jumped to 37.5 per cent on August 3, as the last four months—April, May, June, and July—alone contributed 2,588 female deaths.

However, till July 29, against 1,000 men who received the Covid vaccine dose in Haryana, only 806 women reached vaccination centres for the jab. This is far fewer than the Census 2011 sex ratio in the state which was recorded at 879. Even the projected sex ratio is 887 in Haryana for 2021, as per the Census of India report on population projections (2019). These facts have come to light in a reply of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW) on August 3 to a question on the gender gap in vaccination in the Rajya Sabha. Till July 29, in Haryana, 62.78 lakh men have received doses against 50.63 women, as per the CoWin portal.

The figure of Punjab is worse with just 797 women receiving the vaccination against 1,000 men. The projected sex ratio in Punjab for 2021 is 903. Chandigarh too presents a poor picture with 777 women receiving doses against 1,000 men. The projected sex ratio here is 847 for 2021. On the other hand, more women have received doses in Himachal Pradesh than men. Against 1,000 men, 1033 women have received vaccination here. Here, the projected sex ratio is 972 for 2021. Andhra Pradesh (1,201), Kerala (1,083), Puducherry (1,037), and Chhattisgarh (1,001) too have recorded more women getting vaccinated in comparison to men. But Dadra and Nagar Haveli (427), Daman and Diu (586), J&K (714), Delhi (740), Nagaland (751), and Uttar Pradesh (757) are on the lower side.

Overall, in the entire country, 876 women have got vaccinated against 1,000 men. The projected sex ratio is 948. The MoH&FW reasoned, "At the beginning of Covid-19 vaccination program, pregnancy and lactation were contraindications for vaccination. On the basis of the review of available scientific evidence and consensus of stakeholders, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has approved vaccination of lactating women on May 19 and of pregnant women on July 2". It added, "Further, States/UTs have been provided detailed guidance on preparing counselling and vaccination plans for pregnant women".

Prof. Aswini Nanda, from Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh, who has been studying vaccine hesitancy, opined, "The gender gap has to be understood in terms of factors such as pregnant and lactating mothers are late entrants, women being confined to households, and need someone to escort them to vaccination centres, and they tend to ignore their health for the family. They have less access to information on benefits of vaccination."

"Several women are under the influence of rumours on social media that vaccination could affect their fertility and that they wouldn't be able to conceive. We are fighting back to negate this," said Sunita Rani, Secretary, ASHA Workers Union, Haryana, who is posted in Sonapat.

"The percentage of women will rise as the government has allowed pregnant and lactating mothers. It is not that rumours are influencing women alone. But men also get influenced," said Pravesh, President, ASHA Workers Union, who is posted in Jhajjar.

How The New Abortion Law Fails To Give Women Absolute Right Over Their Bodies

Shahina KK

19 April 2021, thefederal.com

When 24-year-old Neha and her partner Naveen (names changed) got pregnant, they approached a private hospital for abortion. The hospital initially refused to do it and asked whether this was just fun and they would marry someone else later. Later, they demanded ₹25,000 for the procedure. Unable to afford that amount, Neha and Naveen, who are medical students, went to the government-run Thrissur medical college.

The junior resident doctor there refused abortion and gave her a prescription as follows:

“Came for MTP, unmarried;

1) All investigations

2) Report with parents of the girl (father or mother) for MTP and admission”

Despite being a 24-year-old woman and a medical student, Neha was denied her right to abort the baby and had to face humiliation as if she had committed a sin. Neha had this experience just two weeks after the new law—The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021—came into effect with the clearance of the Parliament and the assent of the President of India.

The Act gives the right to seek abortion to unmarried women too, as it replaced the term ‘married woman and her husband’ in the original act of 1971 with ‘a woman and her partner’. However, several hospitals and doctors refuse to change. At the time of writing this report, Neha and her partner were looking to raise money to get the abortion done at the private hospital.

No different for married women

Is it any better for married women? Probably not. Seena (name changed), assistant professor of English in a private college in Kerala, wanted to terminate her second pregnancy as she did not want to have a second child for the time being.

Despite being a clear case of contraception failure, Neha was rejected by two hospitals and had to undergo a humiliating experience as if she had been committing an offence.

“I went to a private hospital in my home town. The doctor was highly reluctant even to listen to me. I tried to explain that I had been using Copper T and it was a case of contraception failure. She said she would take the Copper T out through a surgical procedure and there is a chance for terminating the pregnancy along with it, but she said she will certainly not do it if there is a heartbeat for the foetus,” says Seena.

She rang up another hospital from where she got a very harsh reply at the front office. “They told me that they would only take cases of women who took pills for abortion and developed some complications. This is literally an attitude that pushes women into unsafe methods to terminate pregnancy,” says Seena.

The new MTP Act

The much debated MTP Amendment Act widens the realm of medical termination of pregnancy. Key among them is the extension of the gestation period for abortion from 12 weeks to 20 weeks.

Abortion after 24 weeks is allowed upon the advice of two doctors. This was not allowed under the previous law. Pregnancy over a period of 24 weeks could be terminated only upon the advice of a medical board if substantial foetal abnormality is found. This also was also not allowed according to the previous act of 1971.

Is the new law progressive?

Despite having forward looking provisions, many think that the law is still not progressive. “The MTP Act has never had a right-based approach. It came as part of a family planning programme. It is a provider-control act rather than one empowering a woman to exercise her choice,” says Dr. Shubhasri B, steering committee member, Common Health, a coalition for reproductive health and safe abortion. “Even if there are socially acceptable reasons, still there is a medical board to decide.”

The amendments don’t change the paradigm of the act. Despite extending the gestational period and widening the scope to include unmarried women, it still demands spousal consent and socially legitimate reasons for the termination of pregnancy, such as pregnancy out of rape or having foetal abnormality. “It is still not a matter of right. It only brings another group—the medical board—to the earlier list of authorities empowered to take decisions over a woman’s choice,” says Dr. Mala Ramanathan, working editor, Indian Journal of Medical Ethics. According to a 2015 study conducted across six states in India, a majority of the abortions happen through unsafe methods and outside the realm of authorised healthcare institutions under the supervision of a medical practitioner.

Most abortions happen by consuming pills provided at the chemist’s. There is no idea whether these women get proper advice on how to use the pills for the termination of pregnancy, nor any record of follow-up on whether these women had any post-abortion complexities which might lead to further problems concerning reproductive health.

The social taboo around abortion remains a major hindrance.

“The morality concerns grounded in and out of religion is a very strong reason for making abortion inaccessible to those who deserve it. I know several doctors who are very determined that they wouldn’t provide MTP service unless on medical grounds, no matter what the law says,” a gynaecologist and assistant professor at a government medical college in Kerala told The Federal, adding that this pushes many women to rely on drugs purchased from the chemist’s and to administer the same on ‘Google knowledge’.

“Even doctors use terms such as ‘illegal pregnancy’ to refer to the pregnancy of unmarried women. The fact is that there is nothing called legal or illegal in the realm of law.” says Dr. Mala Ramanathan. Even after the amendment, the control lies very much with the provider (doctor/hospital). “It is the medical practitioner who has the final say on abortion, not the woman who wants it,” says Dr. Subhasri who is also an obstetrician gynaecologist.

A woman’s right over her body still remains an alien concept, according to many doctors and experts who stand for a rights-based approach in matters regarding reproductive health. “Let alone abortion, women do not have the authority even to take an independent decision of their own on contraception and sterilisation. I have often come across women waiting for the consent of not only the husband, but his mother and other family members even to insert copper T,” says Dr. Indira, gynaecologist at a private hospital in Kochi. The infrastructural requirements specified in the law makes the availability and access to abortion service further restricted. For administering abortion service, any healthcare facility requires licence authorised by the district medical officer. The non-availability of licenced services and competent doctors make abortion service highly inaccessible to women in rural areas in India.

There are doctors and healthcare facilities making a deliberate choice not to take a licence for MTP. “Institutions under religious establishments deliberately keep away from taking licences. It makes it easy for them to deny the service. Apart from religious and moral reasons, there are other factors as well,” says Dr. Mala Ramanathan, who adds that abortion is seen as a ‘dirty job’ and those who are ready to do it are considered greedy to make money. This is yet another factor causing resistance to abortion within the doctor’s community, according to her. “Women are heavily dependent on the private sector for abortion services. One reason is confidentiality. The public sector might not assure the privacy and confidentiality they wanted,” says Dr. Subhasri.

On the other hand, there is no institutional mechanism to regulate and control the private sector which makes abortion service a money making business. Experts unanimously agree that there is a complete lack of transparency with regard to the abortion service happening in the private sector.

On one side, the privacy of the woman going for MTP needs to be guarded, on the other, the secrecy surrounding the abortion service in the private sector makes the women extremely vulnerable which often results in financial exploitation.

How 'Pad Bank' Set Up By Allahabad University Students Is Helping Slum Residents Junk Rags

Jyoti Yadav

1 August 2021, The Print

Shuruat Pad Bank — set up in January 2021 — offers free pads to beneficiaries. It has around 300 beneficiaries from slums across Prayagraj.

Prayagraj: For Sarita Bansal, 41, a daily-wager who lives in a slum on the outskirts of Prayagraj, rags had always been the undisputed resource during “that time of the month”, or menstruation. It is a practice she passed on to three of her four daughters who have already hit puberty.

Sanitary napkins, she told ThePrint at her kutchra house on a rainy day this week, were out of the question. “It is so costly. Who would pay Rs 30 per month?” she said, under a leaking polythene roof. “There are already 4 menstruating women in the house. It means we have to spend Rs 120 a month. My next daughter will be hitting puberty in a year or two. That means we will have to spend at least Rs 150 a month.

“I earn Rs 500 in 15 days by making dalia (wooden baskets) and my husband is out of work on most days. The lockdown made it more difficult as we did not have any means to earn our bread.”

A neighbour of Bansal at the slum, known locally as ‘Alopi Bagh Chungi’, echoed her concerns. “We have been used to using clothes for ages now. It’s uncomfortable in the beginning but we learn to adjust to it with time,” she said, adding that her daughter had many complaints about it. But the situation is changing for Bansal, her neighbour, and around 300 women from slums across Prayagraj — Lal Kothi, Lookarganj, Tularam Bagh, Hari Nagar Basti and Namani Basti — with the emergence of the ‘Shuruat Pad Bank’.



An initiative of a group of current and former Allahabad University students, the bank — set up in January 2021 — offers free pads to beneficiaries. All they have to do is reach out to them around their expected menstruation dates. Run on donations, the bank is an offshoot of an education initiative for the underprivileged — ‘Shuruat Ek Jyoti Shiksha Ki’ — founded in 2016 by Abhishek Shukla, 30, who did his postgraduation in social work from Allahabad University.

“During the lockdown period (at the time of the second wave), the bank really became a lifeline for us,” said Renu Devi, one of the beneficiaries.

A hush-hush topic

The slum where the Bansals live accommodates around 3,000 people from the Scheduled Castes. Most residents are daily-wage labourers who alternate between different kinds of

work — from rag-picking to plastic collection and serving as waiters at weddings. The two-room Bansal home has walls caked with dung that crack during heavy rain. They don't have a toilet, much like most of their neighbours. "We go outside in the dark," said Nandini, 15, one of Sarita's daughters, pointing to a place at a distance, when asked about access to basic hygiene.

Before the pad bank came in, the awareness about menstrual hygiene was next to negligible as well. Menstruation, which is associated with many myths in Indian households, remains a taboo subject for many people. The hush-hush treatment given to the biological function forces many girls and women to resort to unhealthy measures like rags to address the bleeding. Menstrual hygiene is important not just for a girl's physical health — poor hygiene practices may make her vulnerable to infections — but also her confidence and mobility. As UNICEF points out, it may affect her attendance in school as well as participation in community life.

Since 2018, as part of a central government initiative, sanitary napkins have been given out at Jan Aushadhi Centres around the country. The pads are priced at Re 1 apiece. But the women at Alopibagh Chungi that ThePrint spoke to said they had never heard of the scheme. It was this lack of awareness that Abhishek and his fellow volunteers sought to tackle with the bank.

'We have come a long way'

The idea for Shuruat Ek Jyoti Shiksha Ki, Abhishek said, struck him after a chance encounter. "One day, I was at a red light and spotted a young girl. I asked the girl, who was 8 years old, why she didn't go to school. She replied that she had to look after her 5-year-old brother," Abhishek added. "I was so bothered by the thought of an 8-year-old girl looking after her 5-year-old brother, I started this education initiative and got it registered the same year.

"Within 6 months, more students joined the initiative (as volunteers) and started teaching the kids. We took classes in open spaces such as parks," he said. "As the pandemic hit the country, we had to rent a two-storey building so that the kids don't drop out. We also take care of their tuition fees." As of now, Abhishek said, 150 students — 80 of them girls — are enrolled with the group. Out of the 80 girls, 50 are also beneficiaries of the pad bank.

The pad bank emerged when the volunteers noticed the lack of awareness regarding menstrual hygiene among their girl students and their families. A monthly workshop followed, where they sought to disseminate information about menstruation and the requisite hygiene practices. Two of the volunteer teachers, Anjali and Shalini, both aged 28, also started a conversation about periods in the classrooms.

"From not mentioning the word periods in our day-to-day conversation, to asking for the pads without any hesitation, we have come a long way," said Anjali. "But we faced rigidity from the community. They reacted to the menstrual talk as if it was some alien concept," she added. "It was justified on their part as the first thing that comes to their mind is earning their bread and butter."

Abhishek said the pad bank was the result of months of continuous efforts. "The word spread fast and we have women from different slums as beneficiaries," he added. The biggest challenge for the volunteers, he said, was to maintain consistency. "We did not want women to use it once and then go back to age-old practices in the absence of free pads. We maintain records and do follow-ups. According to our registered numbers, most women have had access to menstrual hygiene for six months at a stretch now," he added. "We look forward to the day when Nandini's sister does not have to use a cloth instead of a pad," he said. "We are working in that direction. With individual support, we are able to sustain the bank."

(Edited by Sunanda Ranjan)

Thamizhagathil Athigarikum Kuzhanthai Thirumanagal: Pen Kuzhathaigal Paathukapil Tamizhagam Pinokki Selkiratha? (Is Tamil Nadu Lagging Behind In Girl Child Protection?)

Indumathy.G

7 July 2021, Hindu Tamil Thisai

2018ஆம் ஆண்டு தனக்கு நடக்கவிருந்த குழந்தைத் திருமணத்தைத் தடுத்த நிறுத்திய திருவண்ணாமலை மாவட்டத்தைச் சேர்ந்த 14 வயதுச் சிறுமி நந்தினி அனைவராலும் பாராட்டப்பட்டார். அவரின் தைரியத்துக்கு ஊக்கமளிக்கும் வகையில் முதலமைச்சர் விருது வழங்கி கவுரவித்தது தமிழக அரசு.

ஆனால், மதுரையைச் சேர்ந்த 17 வயதுச் சிறுமிக்கு நிகழ்ந்தது வேறு. மதுரை பாண்டியகோவிலைச் சேர்ந்த 17 வயதுச் சிறுமி கடந்த மாதம் தனக்கு நடக்கவிருந்த திருமணத்தைத் துணிச்சலாகக் காவல் நிலையத்துக்குத் தெரிவித்து திருமணத்தை நிறுத்தினார்.

சிறுமியின் தைரியத்துக்காக அவர் பரவலாக பாராட்டப்பட்டார். இந்தப் பாராட்டுகளுக்கிடையே தனது பாட்டியின் வீட்டில் தங்கி இருந்த சிறுமியை, அவரது பெற்றோர்கள் மீண்டும் தங்கள் வீட்டுக்கு அழைத்துச் சென்றுள்ளனர். இரண்டு நாட்களில் சிறுமி தூக்கிட்டுத் தற்கொலை செய்துகொண்டார்.

சிறுமியின் மரணம் தொடர்பாக எழுந்த சந்தேகத்தின் அடிப்படையில் போலீஸார் இந்த வழக்கை விசாரணை செய்து வருகின்றனர்.

திருமணத்தை நிறுத்திய சிறுமி ஏன் தற்கொலையை தேர்வு செய்தார்? வாழ்வை முடித்துக் கொள்ளும் முடிவுக்கு அவரைத் தள்ளியது எது? நவீனமயமான இந்த நூற்றாண்டிலும் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களை ஏன் இன்னமும் முற்றிலுமாக ஒழிக்க முடியவில்லை எனப் பல கேள்விகளை அச்சிறுமியின் மரணம் எழுப்பி இருக்கிறது.

சிறுமி மரணித்துவிட்டார், ஆனால் அவரைத் தற்கொலைக்குத் தூண்டிய, அதே அச்சத்துடன் தமிழகத்தின் எங்கோ ஒரு மூலையில் நாட்களை நகர்த்திக் கொண்டிருக்கும் சிறுமிகளைக் காக்க நாம் என்ன செய்யப் போகிறோம்?

கரோனா நெருக்கடியால் 2020ஆம் ஆண்டு மே மாதத்தில் மட்டும், தமிழகத்தில் குழந்தைகள் திருமணம் 40% அதிகரித்துள்ளதாக சிஆர்ஓய் (CRY) நடத்திய ஆய்வின் முடிவில் கூறப்பட்டது. சேலம், திண்டுக்கல், ராமநாதபுரம், தருமபுரி, ராமநாதபுரம் மாவட்டங்களிலும், 72 பழங்குடி கிராமங்களிலும் தொடர்ந்து குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிகரித்துள்ளதாக அந்த ஆய்வில் தெரிவிக்கப்பட்டது.

இதனைத் தொடர்ந்து ஏராளமான செய்திகளும், விழிப்புணர்வுக் கட்டுரைகளும் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் தொடர்பாக வெளிவந்தன. இதன் காரணமாக சிலநாட்கள் குழந்தைத் திருமணம் தொடர்பான விவாதங்கள் பொதுவெளியில் எழுந்து அடங்கின. ஆனாலும், மீண்டும் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் நடக்கத் தொடங்கிவிட்டன.

இந்த தருணத்தில்கூட தமிழகத்தின் ஏதேனும் பின்தங்கிய பகுதிகளில் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் நடந்துகொண்டு இருக்கலாம். பல ஆண்டுகளாக குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களுக்கு எதிரான விழிப்புணர்வுக் குரல்கள் தொடர்ந்து எழுப்பப்பட்டுக் கொண்டே இருக்கின்றன. ஆனால், அதற்கான தீர்வு இன்றுவரை எட்டப்படாமலே உள்ளது. காரணம் குழந்தைத்

திருமணங்களுக்கு மூல காரணமாக இருப்பது நமது சமூகக் கட்டமைப்பு. குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களை ஊக்குவிக்கும் நமது இந்தியச் சமூக அமைப்பு ஆணி வேரைப் போன்றது. இந்த ஆணி வேரில் மதம், சாதி, வறுமை, பாலினப் பாசுப்பாடு என பல பிரிவுகள் உள்ளன. இப்பிரிவுகளில் அழுத்தத்தை கொடுப்பதன் மூலமே ஆணி வேரில் தளர்வை ஏற்படுத்த முடியும்.

கரோனாவும், குழந்தைத் திருமணமும்:

கரோனா காலத்தில் மட்டும்தான் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிக அளவில் நடைபெற்றதா? இல்லை. கரோனாவுக்கு முன்னரும், குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் நமது சமூகத்தில் நடந்துகொண்டுதான் உள்ளன. ஆனால், அதன் எண்ணிக்கை அங்கொன்றும், இங்கொன்றுமாக இருந்தது. கரோனாவால் இந்த எண்ணிக்கை அதிகரித்துள்ளது என்றுதான் கூறவேண்டும். அவ்வளவுதான். இந்த அதிகரிப்புக்கு முக்கியக் காரணமாக இருப்பது பள்ளிகள் கடந்த ஒரு வருடத்திற்கு மேலாக இயங்காமல் இருப்பது. கல்வி சரியாகக் கிடைக்காதபோதும், கல்வி பெறுவது பாதிக்கப்படும்போதும் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிகரிக்கின்றன. ஆண்டாண்டு காலமாக இதுதான் நடந்து கொண்டிருக்கிறது. கரோனாவின்போது அதுதான் எதிரொலித்திருக்கிறது.

பள்ளிக் கூடங்கள் இயக்கத்தில் இருந்தால் ஒரு சிற்றூரில் நடக்கும் குழந்தைத் திருமணம் குறித்த தகவல் முன்கூட்டியே அறியப்பட்டு அவற்றைத் தடுத்து நிறுத்த வாய்ப்புகள் அதிகம். கரோனா காரணமாகப் பள்ளிகள் கடந்த ஒன்றை வருடங்களாகவே திறக்கப்படவில்லை. விளைவு ஆசிரியர்களுக்கும், மாணவர்களுக்கும் இடையேயான பிளவு அதிகரித்துள்ளது. இந்தப் பிளவு கிராமப் புறங்களிலும், பொருளாதாரத்தில் பின்தங்கிய பகுதிகளிலும் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களாக நடைபெற வழிவகுத்துள்ளன.

அதுமட்டுமல்லாது பெற்றோரை இழந்த இல்லங்களில் உள்ள குழந்தைகளின் பாதுகாப்பைச் சுட்டிக் காட்டி அவர்களின் உற்றார் உறவினர்களும் கொடுக்கும் அழுத்தமும் குழந்தைத் திருமணத்திற்கு காரணமாகியுள்ளது.

குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிகம் நடைபெறும் ராஜஸ்தான், மத்தியப் பிரதேசம், உத்தரப் பிரதேசம், பிஹார், ஜார்க்கண்ட், ஆந்திரா, மேற்கு வங்கம், அசாம், திரிபுரா ஆகிய மாநிலங்களில் குழந்தைத் திருமணத்திற்கு எதிராக எத்தகைய ஆழமான பிரச்சாரங்கள் இருக்கின்றன. அதே பிரச்சாரங்கள் தமிழகத்துக்கு வேண்டி உள்ளது என்பதை கரோனா உணர்த்தி உள்ளது.

குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் குற்றச் செயலாகப் பார்க்கப்படுவதில்லை: கருப்பசாமி, ஈரோடு மாவட்டம், குழந்தைத் திருமணத் தடுப்புச் செயற்பாட்டாளர்

”கோவிட் காலகட்டத்தில் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிகரித்துள்ளன. வழக்கமாகவே மலைப் பிரதேச மாவட்டங்களின் உட்பகுதிகளில் வசிக்கும் மக்களுக்கு அரசின் கல்வி சார்ந்த சலுகைகளோ, திட்டங்களோ அவ்வளவாக வந்தடைவதில்லை. மேல்நிலைப் பள்ளிகளும், கல்லூரி மேற்படிப்புகள் தூரமாக அமைந்துள்ளதால் பெரும்பாலான குழந்தைகளின் பள்ளிப்படிப்பைப் பாதித்தலேயே நிறுத்திவிடுகின்றனர். இதன் காரணமாகவே குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிகரிக்கின்றன.

ஈரோட்டைப் பொறுத்தவரை கடம்பூர், தாளவாடி போன்ற பகுதிகளில் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிக அளவில் நடக்கின்றன. காக்கும் கரங்கள் சார்பாகத் தொடர்ந்து குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் தொடர்பாக மக்களிடம் விழிப்புணர்வைக் கொண்டு சென்று வருகிறோம்.

குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களை இப்பகுதிகளில் உள்ள மக்கள் குற்றச் செயலாகவே பார்ப்பதில்லை. இவர்களைப் பொறுத்தவரை காதல் திருமணங்கள்தான் குற்றச் செயல். அவைதான் குற்றம்.

பெண் பிள்ளைகள் தங்கள் மேற்படிப்பைத் தேர்வு செய்யும்போதுதான் அவர்களின் திருமணங்கள் தள்ளிப் போவதற்கான ஒரே வழி. இல்லையேல் ஒன்பதாம், பத்தாம் வகுப்புடன் பள்ளிப் படிப்பை நிறுத்திவிட்டு பக்கத்தில் உள்ள நூற்பாலைகளில் சில மாதங்கள் வேலை செய்து பின்னர் திருமணத்துக்குத் தயாராகிவிடுகிறார்கள். பொருளாதாரத்தில் பின்தங்கிய அனைத்துக் குடும்பங்களிலும் இது நடக்கிறது.

குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களை நிறுத்துவதைவிட, திருமணத்துக்குப் பிறகு அத்திருமணங்களைக் கண்டறிவதும், அதற்கான தண்டனைகளைப் பெற்றுத் தருவதும் தான் சவாலானதுதான்.

இதில் சிக்கல் என்னவென்றால் திருமணமான சிறிது நாட்களில் சில பெண்கள் கர்ப்பம் அடைந்து விடுகின்றனர். அவ்வாறு இருக்கும்போது கருக்கலைப்பு செய்ய வேண்டும் என்று சட்டம் சொல்கிறது. ஆனால், குடும்பங்கள் குழந்தையைத்தான் கருவியாகப் பயன்படுத்துகின்றனர். அவர்களுக்கு குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களில் இருக்கும் உண்மை, பிரச்சினைகள் புரிவதில்லை. மக்களிடம் தொடர் விழிப்புணர்வு ஏற்படுத்துவதன் மூலம்தான் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களைத் தடுக்க முடியும்”

நகரங்களிலும் தொடரும் குழந்தைத் திருமணம்: தேவநேயன்

”இந்திய சமூகக் கட்டமைப்பைப் பொறுத்தவரை குழந்தைத் திருமணம் என்பது, எல்லாக் காலத்திலும் இருந்திருக்கிறது. எல்லா பேரிடர்களுக்குப் பின்னும் குழந்தைகள் மீதான வன்முறை அதிகரித்துள்ளது. பெண் குழந்தைகளுக்குப் பாதுகாப்பு இல்லாதபோது குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் அதிக அளவில் நடக்கின்றன. இரண்டாவது பாரம்பரியம். ஒரு பெண் பூப்பெய்துவிட்டால் அவள் திருமணத்துக்குத் தயாராகிவிட்டதாக இந்தியச் சமூகம் நம்புகிறது. இதனை மத ரீதியாகவும் ஏற்றுக் கொள்கிறார்கள், இன ரீதியாகவும் ஏற்றுக்கொள்கிறார்கள். ஆனால், இந்த மனநிலை ஆண் குழந்தைகளிடம் இல்லை.

மலைவாழ் கிராமங்களில் வசிக்கும் மக்களின் குழந்தைகள் அவர்கள், பகுதியில் 1 – 8 வகுப்பு வரையில் உள்ள பள்ளியில் படிக்கிறார்கள் என்றால், 8ஆம் வகுப்புடன் அந்தக் குழந்தைகளின் பள்ளிப்படிப்பு நிறுத்தப்படுகிறது. பெண் குழந்தைகளின் பாதுகாப்பு கருதி தூரமான பள்ளிக் கூடங்களுக்கு அவர்களை அனுப்ப பெற்றோர்கள் தயாராக இல்லை. அவ்வாறு இருக்குபோது பள்ளிப் படிப்பு தடைப்பட்டு அது திருமணத்தில் முடிகிறது. இந்தக் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களின் பின்னணியில் முக்கியக் கருவியாகச் சாதியமும் செயல்படுகிறது. தன் பெண் வேறு சாதியைச் சேர்ந்தவரைத் திருமணம் செய்துகொள்ளப் போகிறாரா என்ற அச்சம் பெற்றோர்களிடம் உள்ளது.

கிராமங்களில் மட்டுமல்ல சென்னையின் புறநகர்ப் பகுதிகளான கண்ணகி நகரில் கூட குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் நடைபெறுகின்றன.

சிறுவயதில் திருமணம் முடிந்தால் வரதட்சணைக் குறைவு போன்ற பல காரணங்கள் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களுக்குப் பின்னால் இருக்கின்றன. இவை எல்லாம் ஒருபுறம் இருக்கட்டும். தமிழகத்தில் உள்ள குழந்தைகள் நல ஆணையமும், குழந்தை நல அமைப்புகளும் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் நடைபெறாமல் இருக்க என்ன செய்துள்ளனர்? இக்கரோனா காலத்தில் தமிழகத்தில் குழந்தை நல உரிமைகள் அமைப்பு என்ன செய்தது?

இந்த ஆண்டில் இவ்வளவு குழந்தைகள் திருமணங்கள் நடந்துள்ளன என்று டேட்டா கொடுப்பது மாவட்டக் குழந்தை நல அமைப்புகளின் பணியா நிச்சயம் இல்லை.

குழந்தைத் திருமணச் சட்டத்தைத் தமிழகத்தை முறையாக இவர்கள் அமல்படுத்துகிறார்களா?

2000ஆம் ஆண்டு உச்ச நீதிமன்றம் கிராம அளவில் குழந்தைகளுக்கான நல அமைப்புகளை உருவாக்க வேண்டும் என்று தீர்ப்பளித்திருந்தது. தமிழகத்தில் உடனடியாக அப்போது அந்த அமைப்புகள் உருவாக்கப்படவில்லை. ஆனால் 2012ஆம் ஆண்டில்தான் ஒருங்கிணைந்த குழந்தை பாதுகாப்புக்குத் தமிழக அரசு நிதி ஒதுக்கியது.

இவர்கள்தான் தமிழகத்தில் கிராம குழந்தைகள் பாதுகாப்புக் குழு உருவாக்கிவிட்டதாகக் கூறுகிறார்கள். அவர்கள் கூறுவது நிஜத்திலா? பேப்பரிலா?

தமிழகத்தின் குழந்தைகளுக்கான அமைப்புகள் முறையாகச் செயல்பட்டால் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் நடப்பதற்கு வாய்ப்பு மிகக் குறைவு. தமிழகத்தில் இயங்கும் குழந்தைகள் உரிமை ஆணையத்தில் அரசியல் தலையீடுகள் உள்ளன. நிதியும் சரியாக வழங்கப்படுவது இல்லை. குழந்தைகள் மீதான வன்முறைகள் குறித்த எந்த தரவுகள் சரியாக இருப்பது இல்லை. இந்த செயல்பாடுகளில் உடனடி மாற்றம் வேண்டும் இல்லையெல் குழந்தைகளுக்கான பாதுகாப்பற்ற மாநிலமாகத்தான் தமிழகம் இருக்கும்”

சமூக மாற்றம், பொருளாதார மாற்றம் தேவை

பெண் குழந்தைகள் மீதான பொதுப்புத்தி மாற வேண்டும். பெண் குழந்தைகள் சமைகள் அல்ல. பெண் குழந்தைகளுக்கான வாழ்வியல் இலக்கு திருமணம் மட்டும்தான் என்ற நிலைப்பாட்டில் பெற்றோர்களுக்குள் மாற்றம் ஏற்பட வேண்டும்.

அந்த மாற்றம் பெண்களின் அதிகாரங்கள் வலுவடையும்போதே எழும். குழந்தைத் திருமணம் என்பது இந்தியச் சமூகம் ஆண்டாண்டு காலமாகத் தொடர்ந்து வரும் சமூகக் குற்றம் என்பதை குடும்பங்கள் உணர வேண்டும். ஆண் பிள்ளைகளின் படிப்புக்காகச் சேமிக்கும் பெற்றோர்கள், பெண் குழந்தைகளுக்குத் திருமணத்துக்காகவே தங்களது சேமிப்பைத் தொடங்குகின்றன.

ஆகையால், பெண் பிள்ளைகள் பொருளாதார ரீதியாக யாரையும் சார்திருக்காத நிலையை அடைவதற்கு உரிய சமூக திட்டங்களை அரசு இன்னும் கூடுதல் கவனம் எடுத்து மேம்படுத்த வேண்டும்.

திருமணத்துக்காகவே ஒரு பெண் பிறக்கிறாள், திருமணமும், தாய்மையும் தான் ஒரு பெண்ணை முழுமையாக்கிறது போன்ற பிற்போக்குக் கற்பிதங்கள் உடைக்கப்பட்டு பெண்கள் அதிகாரப்படுத்தப்பட வேண்டும்.

குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களை தடுப்பது இயக்கமாக மாற வேண்டும்

2018 ஆம் ஆண்டு யுனிசெஃப் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் சார்ந்து அறிக்கை ஒன்றை வெளியிட்டிருந்தது. அதில் கடந்த பத்து ஆண்டுகளில் தெற்காசியாவில் குழந்தைத் திருமணங்கள் குறையத் தொடங்கியுள்ளதைக் குறிப்பிட்டு இருந்தது. இது ஆரோக்கியமான செய்திதான். இருப்பினும் அதில் 2030ஆம் ஆண்டு இறுதிக்குள் தெற்காசியாவில் மேலும் 12 கோடி குழந்தைகளுக்குத் திருமணம் நடைபெறும் என்ற எச்சரிக்கை விடுக்கப்பட்டிருக்கிறது. உண்மையில் யுனிசெஃப் கூறிய இந்த எண்ணிக்கை இரட்டிப்பாகும் சூழலைதான் கரோனா ஏற்படுத்தியுள்ளது.

இவற்றை எல்லாம் கவனத்தில் கொண்டு குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களைத் தடுப்பது இயக்கமாக மாற வேண்டும். கடந்த ஓராண்டில் பள்ளிப் படிப்பைப் பாதியிலேயே நிறுத்திய மாணவ, மாணவிகளைக் கண்டறிந்து அவர்கள் மீண்டும் பள்ளிகளில் பயில நடவடிக்கை எடுக்கப்பட வேண்டும்.

இதற்கான சிறப்புக் குழுவை அரசு உடனடியாக அமைக்க வேண்டும். குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களுக்கான எதிர்வினைகளை பள்ளிகளில் ஆழமாகப் படர வேண்டும். பள்ளிகளே குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களை நிறுத்துவதற்கான ஆயுதம். பெண் கல்வியை ஊக்குவிக்க கொண்டுவரப்பட்ட திட்டங்களுக்கு கடந்த கால ஆட்சியில் சரியாக நிதி ஒதுக்கவில்லை என்ற முக்கிய குற்றச்சாட்டை சமூக நலன் மற்றும் மகளிர் உரிமைகள் துறை அமைச்சர் கீதா ஜீவன் தெரிவித்திருக்கிறார். இந்தக் குறைபாடுகள் உடனடியாக களையப்பட வேண்டும்.

குழந்தைத் திருமணங்களுக்கு எதிரான விழிப்புணர்வு பிரச்சாரங்கள் எல்லா ஊடகங்கள் வழியாகவும் சென்றடைய வேண்டும்.

குழந்தை திருமணங்களை தடுப்பதற்காக அரசு அளித்துள்ள வாக்குறுதிகளை வீரியமாகவும், விரைவாகவும் செயல்படுத்த வேண்டும். அதுமட்டுமே தற்போதைய சூழலில் பெண் குழந்தைகளின் எதிர்காலக் கனவுகளை நனவாக்கும். பெண் குழந்தைகளும், அவர்களின் கனவுகளும் கொண்டாட்டத்துக்கு உரியவை... கொண்டாடுங்கள்... குழந்தைத் திருமணம் எங்கும் இனி நடக்க வேண்டாம், எந்தச் சிறுமியும் இறக்க வேண்டாம்...!

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* லாட்லி ஊடகக் கூட்டாய்வுக்காக எழுதப்பட்ட கட்டுரை.

இக்கட்டுரையில் உள்ள கருத்துகள் அனைத்தும் கட்டுரையாளரின் பார்வை மட்டுமே. இதில் கூறப்பட்டுள்ள கருத்துகளுக்கும் லாட்லி (Laadli) மற்றும் யுஎன்ஹெப்பிஏவுக்கும் (UNFPA) தொடர்பில்லை.

Adavallem Thakkuva (Women Can Run Home And Earn Money Also)

Avula Yamuna

6 August 2021, V6 Velugu

ఇంటిముందు ఆటో నౌ ండ్ వినపడగానే.. “సురేశ్ ... కొత్తలుల్ పై నల్ అయిమ్మిందా”? అనుకుంటూ పళ్లెలోకి వసుత్తంది భారము. “ బలడర్ కి యాభై కాదు యాభై ఐదు లకవ్వలు కావాల”ట అని టానష్ వడుతూ చెబుతాడు భరత్. ‘కానీ’, అంటూ ఆమె మాట అందుకునేలోపి ‘అరె ..డబుల్ విషయాలలో ఆడవాళ్లలో జోకముం ఎందుకు ? నువ్వెళ్లలో ‘టీ’ తీసుకురా’ అంటాడు మామగారు. వంటింటిలోకి వాళ్ల టీ పెట్టుకోకున్నట్ంది. టీతో పాటు “ఇది నావంతు అంటూ” ఆన్లైన్ శాశీ జిజినెన్ చేసి ఆమె సందోదించిన ఐదులకవ్వల రూ పాయల చెక్ ఇస్తున్నట్ంది. “మామయ్యా! ఆడవాళ్లలో ఇల్లూల్ నడవగలరూ .. డబుల్ సందోదించగలరు” అంటుంది. టీవీలో ఈ యాడ్ కనిపించిన పర్తినారీ భలే సమాధానం చెప్పింది అనుకోని వాళ్లలో ఉండరు. కానీ అలా అనుకున్న వాళ్లలో చాలామంది డబుల్ విషయాలలో ఆడవాళ్లలో పట్ల ఉన్న చిన్న చూపుని మారంపర్తినవరు.

‘నీకేం తెలుసు?’, ‘నువ్వు కూడా సలహాలు ఇస్తావా?’, ‘డబుల్ విషయాలలో నీ పెత్తనం ఏంటి?’

ఈ మాటలు ఎప్పుడో ఒకప్పుడు పర్తిన ఇంటిలో వినిపినట్లయి అంటే అతిశయోక్తి కాదు. ఆడవాళ్లలో మూడు పూటలా వంటచేయాలి. ఇంటిలో అందరి బాగోగులు చూసుకోవాలి. ఎంత సందోదించుకున్నా డబుల్ వయవహారాలలో, కుటుంబ నిరణయాలలో తలదూరకూడదు. ఆడవాళ్లలో అనినరంగాలో మగవాళ్లతో సమానంగా అడుగులేసుకున్నప్పటికీ..డబుల్ , కుటుంబ నిరణయాలలో వాళ్ల అభిప్రాయాలకి పెద్దగా విలువ ఉండటోలేదు. ఇలా ఎందుకు జరుగుతోంది? అసలు ఆరిథ్క నిరణయాలలో ఆడవాళ్లలో నాథనం ఏంటి? ఈ సబాజ్ కట్లోకి వాళ్లముందు కొనిన్ రీయల్ ఎగాజ్ యులన్ చదవాలి.

చిన్నప్పటి నుంచే చిన్న చూపు

ఆ తండ్రికి కూతురు మీనానే పర్తినం. ఆమె ఏం అడిగినా కాదనదు. ఏం చేయాలనుకున్నా అడుడే చేపి వాడు కాదు. ఎలాంటి కట్టుబాటుల బట్టికూడా ఆమెను సీ వచ్చగా బతకనిస్తాడు. కానీ, డబుల్ విషయాలకి వచ్చేసరికి మీనా మాట పట్టించుకోడు. ‘చిన్నప్పటి నుంచే. నీకేం తెలుసుదంటూ’ ఆమె మాటను తీసి నొత్తడు. యూకేలోపి రున్న యూనివర్సిటీలో జిజినెన్ అడిమీసీ టర్షన్ చేసిన కూతురిన తన జిజినెన్ నిరణయాలలో ఇన్వోల్వ్ చెయ్యమిడు. మీనాలాటి ఎంతోమంది ఆడపిల్లలలో పర్తినం ఇది. ఇంటి వసులోలో నాయం చేయమని కూతురిని అడుగుతారు. కొడుకును అడగరు. ఇంటి నిరణయాలలో కొడుకు సలహా తీసుకుంటారు. కూతురి అభిప్రాయానిన మాట వరసకైనా అడగరు. డబుల్ వయవహారాల చక్కబాట్ హక్కు, కుటుంబ నిరణయాలు తీసుకునే అధికారం మగవాళ్లకే ఉందన నట్టు పెంచుతారు మగపిల్లలతో. ఆడపిల్లల బుర్రలోలోనూ ఇదే ఎక్కినాన్దు.

పొద్దుపు ఆమె పెండెంట్

పిల్లలు, కుటుంబ బాధయితల కోసం ఉదోమిగానిన వదిలేసింది రజిని. ఉదయం టీ, టిఫినుల్, మధ్యాహ్నం అతవ్తమామలకి ఇప్పట్మైన వయకాలతో లంబ్, ఈవినిన్ శాన్ కన్, రాజర్ డిన్ నర్...ఎకన్ ట్రాగ్ గా ఇంటి వసులు. అయినా ఏరోజూ విసిరిపోలేదు. అనింటిని పర్తినం బామ్మలెన్ చేస్తున్నట్ంది. భరత్ బడెట్లోనే ఇంటి అవసరాలనింటిని తీరిచ్చింది. కానీ, సందోదించిన నిరణయాలు తీసుకునే హక్కు మగవాళ్లకే అంటాడు ఆ భరత్. ఫస్ట్ థారీ ఖు రాగానే వ్షాపుకెళ్ల సరుకులు కొని తెన్నాడు. కానీ, ఆ నెల మొత్తానికీ ఏమేం సరుకులు కావాలి? ఎంతమేర అవసరమో చేపి వ్షి ఆమె. భరత్ సందోదన.. పిల్లల చదువులు.. ఇతర ఖర్చులతో దృష్టిలో పెట్టుకుని ఉన్నంతలోనే ఇంటిలో వాళ్లకే డబుల్ పునియే తెలివి ఉందామెకి. భరత్ ఇంటి ఖర్చుల కోసం ఇచ్చిన కొడిద్ మొత్తంలోనే కొంత డబుల్ మిగిలిన బంగారం కొంటుంది. అదే ఆపదలో ఆదుకుంటుందన ఆలోచన ఆమెకి. పొద్దుపు విషయంలో ఆమెని మించిన వాళ్లలో లేరు. ఇనిన్ విషయాలలో ఆమె తెలివితేటలు, మని మేనేజ్మెంట్ కిల్యర్ కట్గా ఉన్నా ఆరిథ్క వయవహారాలలో, ఇంటి నిరణయాలలో ‘నీకేం తెలుసు?’ అనే మాటతో ఆమెని చిన్న చూపుచేడం ఎంతవరకు కరెక్ట్?

ఇదే సట్టిల మాట

ఈ సమస్య కేవలం ఒకరిదేరేదే కాదు మన దేశంలో సగానికిపై గా ఆడవాళ్లకేది. రీసెంట్ గా వరలడ్ ఎకనామిక్ ఫోరమ్ (డబుల్ టు ఈఎఫ్) 170 అంశాల ఆధారంగా పర్తినం వయవహారాల సీర్వీస్ పురుషుల సమానత్వం ఒక అసెట్ తయారు చేసింది. ఆ అసెట్లో మనదేశం 129 వ నాథనంలో ఉంది. ఇంతకు ముందు ఇదే అసెట్లో 108 వ నాథనంలో ఉన్నాం. 21 నాథనాలు కిందికి దిగడానికి కారణం ఆడవాళ్లకి తక్కువ జీతాలు ఇవ్వడం, డబుల్ వయవహారాలలో వాళ్లని భాగస్వామ్యం చేయకపోవడమే అని డబుల్ టు ఈఎఫ్ చెబుతోంది. భారత పర్తినం విడుదల చేసిన ఐదే నేషనల్ ఫార్ముమి ఆ లెట్ సర్వేలోనూ మని విషయాలలో ఆడవాళ్ల పర్తినం ఉండటోలేదని తెలింది.

17 షాట్లరు, ఐదు కేందర్ వాలత వార్తాలు వార్తానన్ ఈ సర్వేలో ఇంటికి సందోదించిన వసుత్తులు కొనే విషయంలో మారం ఆడవాళ్లకి వాతర్ బాగానే ఉందని తెలింది. వసుత్తులు కొనే విషయంలో బిహార్, నాగాలాండ్, మిజోరాంలలో ఆడవాళ్ల నిరణయాలలో ఎక్కువగా ఉన్నాయి. కానీ, ఇంటికి సందోదించిన ఆరిథ్క నిరణయాలలో మారం మగవాళ్ల మాటపై నల్. అలాగే ఎల్ఎకన్ ఎమ్ ఈ 2020 సర్వే పర్తినం 66 శాతం మంది సింగిల్ విమెన్ లో 28 శాతం మంది డబుల్ విషయాలలో తండ్రిపై నే ఆధార పడుతున్నారని. పెళ్లైన ఆడవాళ్లలో 69 శాతం మంది భరత్ నిరణయాలకే తలూపు తున్నారని. పిల్లలున్న ఆడ వాళ్లలో

24 శాత్రం మండి మాశర్ డబుబ్ విషయాలో నవ్ తతర్ంగా నిరణయాలు తీసుకుంటున్నారని చెప్పాత్తండి ఈ సబ్డి. డబుబ్ విషయంలో ఇంకోత్నే కాదు ఆఫీసులోనూ ఆడవాళ్లలో చినన్ చూపి . ఆఫీసులో పై అధికారిగా ఆడవాళ్లు లంటే మగవాళ్లు పనిచేయడానికి కూడా ఇష్టపడటోదని చాలా సబ్డిలు చెప్పాన్యి. పైగా జీతాల విషయంలోనూ ఆడవాళ్లలో చినన్ చూపి . ఆడవాళ్లపేరు మీద ఆసిత్వానుత్లు కూడా పెద్దదగా రాయరు . ఈ పరిస్థితులో మారువ రావాలంటే జనాల మైండ్ సెట్ మారాల. అది మన ఇంటినుంచే మొదలవాల. పర్తి ఇంకోత్ ఆడపిల్లలన్ కుటుంబ నిరణయాలో భాగంచేయాల. చినన్ పవ్టిన్ చి కుటుంబ ఖరుచులు, పొదుపు గురించి అవగాహన కలవ్వాల. ముఖ్యంగా మగపిల్లలన్ ఆడపిల్లల పటల్ గౌరవంతో పెంచాల. ఆవుల యమున

Where 'Digital India' is Out Of Range!

Priyanka Tupe

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Bhagyashree Bokad is from the Bhoirwadi area of Pimpalgaon, a part of the Junnar region of the Pune district. She is a first-year B.A. student of Annasaheb Waghire college located in the Otur part of Pimpalgaon. As the daily commute to the college from her residence is not feasible, she lives in the tribals' government-provided hostel. The daily bus makes only one trip between Bhoirwadi and Otur. If it is already overcrowded, many girls from Otur will miss their college. During the COVID-19 crisis, as the college education in the entire state became online, it proved to be a crisis for the likes of Bhagyashree. Her family sustains an income dependent on daily wages, and there are three students in her family - she and her two brothers. They shared just one smartphone. Under these circumstances, Bhagyashree had no recourse other than to join the daily-wages workforce while her younger brother would attend lectures on the mobile. In a challenging situation like this, the family scrambled together, working on daily wages for a few months, and managed to purchase a mobile phone worth Rupees 10,000. Apart from that, Mr. Anil Sable, a local government official and author-activist, helped them acquire a second-hand laptop. It was then Bhagyashree's education became streamlined again. Nevertheless, sporadic electricity supply and unreliable internet access continue to be hurdles in this process.

All these are recent developments specific to the lockdown and its aftermath. However, it does not mean all was well before, for the education of girls like Bhagyashree who hail from the local Mahadev Koli, Katkari, Adivasi communities. A big part of the problem was about technical education and its resources. The nature and the extent of unemployment are such that even people with a degree in conventional subjects are jobless - let alone these girls. These girls cannot afford education in professional subjects. So they go for nursing courses besides their conventional B.A. and M.A. courses. And when this is not sufficient, they further go after courses like typing, computer education, spoken English, soft skills - stuff that everyone in today's world needs. But in this day and age, it is a luxury for these girls to handle a college-lab computer - let alone have a laptop of their own.

Says Bhagyashree, "If Anil uncle (Mr. Anil Sable) from the Aashramshala (government-run) had not paid my fees for the MSCIT or the typing courses, then I would not be able to do those. There is no way my parents, who are daily wage workers, would afford it. Even I have to go for the same farm jobs in my spare time. It helps get food on the table, but where is the money for a computer?"

This is the ground reality of hundreds of girls like Bhagyashree. Mr. Anil Sable, a IV-grade employee of the Government-run schools for tribals, has paid nearly 25-30 girls' fees for the MSCIT course. His sole mission is to educate the economically deprived class girls from the Junnar area. Lately, he has received much support from some folks from the literary community like Mangesh Kale, Cicilia Carvallo, Shivkanya Shashi, Jayashree Joshi, Gulab Sapkal. NRIs like Praveen Kshirsagar too joined in the effort.

We have witnessed a precarious situation in educational systems in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic and its aftermath. All the ballyhoo about the "Glory of the New Digital India" aside, it is abundantly clear that millions of Indian students dealing with the lack of infrastructure and resources face complex realities daily. Even in the absence of the pandemic, things like 'Digital India, Digital Education' are nothing but pipe dreams for millions of these students. It is a far fetched dream for many of these girls even to have their email account. 'Come on, who these days deals with this!' one might wonder. But I, for one, have seen how these girls are finding something for writing an email to be a monumental task.

Girls from a few villages in the Aalephata part of the Junnar Tehsil of Pune walk 5-6 Kilometers every day to reach school. They attend school after taking care of the

household duties, working on farm jobs in summer and winter vacations, traversing through challenging terrains, at times, facing the risks of the leopards. Finally, overcoming challenging obstacles, they graduate from secondary school. After that, the million-dollar question: what next? "Career counselling" is a luxury most tribal girls cannot afford. There is a significant disparity between the urban class students who have ample opportunities, avenues, and amenities and these students from deprived classes from distant regions. Acute poverty, lack of resources, years of famine, depleting income and eroding land pose daunting challenges and consume whatever energy and will they have left. How will they build the necessary resources to carve a career out?

Venturing out a mere 70 to 80 KMs out of Pune, one can quickly meet these struggling students. Such is the plight of the Mahadev Koli and the Thakar communities residing in the hilly areas. They sustain a tiny piece of farmland upon which some unreliable rice grows. The recourse is to do hard labour in brick factories or someone's farms or fishing - equally unpredictable and bringing in hardly an income. Young children save some money for their education from their share of hard labour. Girls have it worse than boys as, besides school-work and labour at workplaces, they also have domestic duties. And in a family with siblings, if there is just one resource like a laptop computer available, then the male heir becomes its rightful owner. Often the family scene is that the girl would work on a farm while her brother attends online lectures.

The gender disparity in educational resources is not a gift of the pandemic. It has been a trend that has followed decades since women's education itself made its humble beginning a century and a quarter ago. The pandemic just made the problem acute. Alfia is a young girl from the Govandi area of Mumbai. When her father lost his factory job, he started manufacturing masks. It barely provides for the family. The only smartphone in the family went to the elder brother appearing for the crucial year of higher secondary entrance. Says Alfia, "Of course my brother's important year meant he would get the smart phone. In any case, I could not secure college admission despite scoring 71 percent, thanks to our poor conditions. My teacher was even ready to pay my tuition fees, but where would one get a mobile phone?"

Because of this, Mr. Anil Sable made it his mission to get computer technology education for these Adivasi girls of his area. When asked why he specifically helped girls when even boys need this, he responded, "These girls lead all their lives in an acute sense of deprivation. They know they are not meant to receive higher education and expect themselves to get married off early. In the likely event of them getting married even before their basic education, there ought to be something that would help them get a job. These days a basic introduction to technology is an absolute must. There is a high degree of alcoholism in Mahadev Koli, Adivasi class people. The chances that these girls will deal with uncertainties are substantial. This is why I spend all my energy on the girls who are much less privileged than the boys."

Mr. Anil Sable made his initial expenses to get these girls MSCIT course admissions. As a result, approximately 25 girls have completed the course - along with typing too, in some cases. Reshma Pote, Rekha Bhalchim, Kasturi Bhalchim, Gauri Dabhade, Asmita Waje, Vrushali Dharade - to name a few.

"After all, how much should an MSCIT course cost?" might be a question a well-to-do person might ask, but 4000 rupees is still a considerable amount for many girls to pay for a course like MSCIT. Shilpa Bokad added to this, "Owing to the lockdown, everything was closed, including the schools and hostels. It costs a hundred rupees daily to go to the Tehsil and attend the course. How do we arrange this money everyday? If one takes the morning bus, the class is over in an hour and a half. Then we wait for the evening bus. Eat our homemade lunch somewhere. There is not even a public toilet for us anywhere. But Anil Sable Uncle allowed us to stay in the hostel during this time. It is a problem not just to pay for the course fees. Even the commute is a problem. Someone like Sheetal Barde received a bicycle from Mr. Sable, who took assistance from his friend."

When the girls were asked as to how this course is helping them, says Shilpa Bokad, “We would have to go to tahsil place and visit a Net-cafe to fill out any online exam or admission form prior to this. A hundred Rupees for the commute, additional hundred plus at the Net cafe and more for getting photocopies and additional prints. So we used to lose a day’s worth of wages just for this. With the completion of course we can at least fill out the forms all by ourselves. Who knows, we might land a job tomorrow. Here is some hoping for it.”

While spending time with these girls, I observed how getting to handle a computer, getting to see it, use it, and own it is a dream-like situation for these girls. Something ordinarily available to many women is not the case for these girls. Studies are conducted under the “Digital Divide” research area as to how this unequal and unfair distribution of resources affects the deprived class people, especially women. The National Statistical Organization’s survey was published last year in September. Data was compiled between July 2017 and June 2018, according to which, only 10 per cent of Indian households have a laptop or mobile/tablet/desktop. Only 25 per cent of households have internet connectivity (this includes mobile internet, wi-fi, broadband etc.) While 42 per cent of urban houses have net connections, only 15 per cent from the rural areas did. Kerala is the only state with moderate success, with 67 per cent urban connectivity and 39 per cent rural connectivity. This helps us gauge the nature and the extent of the ‘Digital Divide’ in India.

While dealing with the dual challenges of lack of connectivity and technology training, I came across a shocking aspect revealed by these Junnar Adivasi girls. They mentioned that they were never exposed to a computer throughout their school years, let alone receiving any training. No one has ever seen the computer lab of the school. Says Shilpa Bokad, “Every day a yellow car would visit our school. It had a few computers. Every class would get half an hour daily to visit that car for the computer training. And yet most of us would not even get to touch a computer.”

Upon hearing this, I tried to contact the Project Officer of the Junnar Ghodegaon region, Ms. Jagruti Kumre. I meant to ask questions about the lack of attention paid to the tech education in schools, whether there was any truth to what these girls were saying, and whether the Adivasi department of the state can impart them a better education about what the Government policies are. But, unfortunately, I never got any response from that side.

Mr. Anil Sable has published a collection of Marathi poetry titled “Tahora” a few years ago. His latest collection of Marathi stories, titled “Piwla piwla pachola”, has been published by Papyrus. He is finding his footing as an author. Lone soldiers like Mr. Sable are trying to get the Adivasi girls of his region some “Digital Space”. Of course, even boys would deal with these problems. Hence I inquired with Mr. Sable about the situation with the Adivasi boys. He responded with a resigned tone that the boys seem significantly less inclined to education in general. It is essential to understand the complex socio-economic factors behind such shocking realities. I consulted Dr. Milind Bokil, a renowned author, researcher and scholar of Adivasi life.

“In Junnar, Alephata area, reside 3 tribes mainly. Mahadev Koli, Thakar and Katkari. Of these, Mahadev Koli and Thakar possess tiny pieces of land. All that is located in the remote hilly areas. Katkaris do not have land of their own. They try to sustain through hard labour and fishing. Of course there is a vast gap between the income from agriculture and that of factory jobs. As a result, the male members of the Katkari household deal with a lot of frustration dealing with the low income, family responsibilities and failure to meet them. Sometimes accidents happen at the workplace and that throws them to alcoholism. Sometimes alcoholism leads to workplace injuries. It is a vicious circle. It is not only the story of Adivasis. It is the case for male members of all deprived classes who are victims of frustration and alcoholism. They find little interest in education as it is not catered to the life they live. It is also a question of use of the language. The education in our system is not skill-based and there is little hope in landing any employment. The employment opportunities in this class were very low even before the pandemic. Compared to this,

there is much greater inclination among the Adivasi girls for getting educated. They have the fear of getting married off early if their education stops. So, to support their families, to postpone their own weddings these girls show tremendous zeal in pursuing their own education. Women in these areas of Maharashtra have evolved tremendously and its good effects are visible in the Adivasi areas. The women's self help groups have brought women together and even that has some positive effect."

Bokils is a well-known Marathi author who thoroughly studied Katakri tribals and their social problems.

(Translated from Marathi to English)

महिलाओं को आरक्षण नहीं, शिक्षा व सशक्तीकरण चाहिए, पंजाब के इन दो केसों ने किया साबित

इंदरप्रीत सिंह

29 अप्रैल 2021, दैनिक जागरण

महिलाओं को आरक्षण से ज्यादा शिक्षा और सशक्तीकरण की जरूरत है। महिलाएं भले ही आरक्षण के दम पर चुनीं तो जाती हैं पर शिक्षा न होने से पिछड़ जाती हैं। वहीं शिक्षित महिला पुरुषों के मुकाबले बेहतर साबित होती हैं।

वर्ष 1995 में देशभर में पंचायतों में अनुसूचित जातियों के लिए आरक्षण लागू हुआ। उसके ठीक 25 साल बाद एक बार फिर महिलाओं को स्थानीय निकाय इकाइयों में आगे लाने के 50 फीसद का आरक्षण लागू किया गया। 25 साल में एक पीढ़ी बदल गई। आरक्षण से क्या महिलाएं अपने आपको सशक्त कर पाईं या फिर वे आज भी अपने पिता, पति या भाई की रबड़ स्टैप हैं, इसको समझने के लिए इन दो अलग-अलग केसों को समझना होगा..

केस-1

सरपंच बन जाती हैं रबड़ स्टैप

यह बात 1997 की है। 1995 में अनुसूचित जाति को पंचायत चुनाव में आरक्षण का लाभ मिलने के बाद पंजाब में भी पंचायत चुनाव हुए थे। चुनाव हुए अभी चार महीने ही हुए थे। बठिंडा के एक गांव की अनुसूचित जाति की महिला सरपंच एडीसी (डी) के आफिस में प्रोजेक्ट अफसर साधू राम कुशला के पास आती है और अपने सरपंच चुने जाने का सर्टिफिकेट उन्हें देते हुए कहती हैं कि उन्हें सरपंची नहीं करनी। यह हैरान करने वाला मामला था।

साधू राम कुशला अघेड़ उम्र की महिला को बिठाते हैं और कहते हैं कि आप क्यों सरपंची छोड़ना चाहती हो? वह बताती हैं कि चुनाव से पहले वह सरपंच साहिब के यहां कूड़ा कर्कट बीनने का काम करती थीं। बदले में आठ सौ रुपये महीना मिलते थे। सरपंच बनते ही उन्होंने कूड़ा कर्कट बीनने का काम यह कहते हुए वापस ले लिया कि अब आप सरपंच हो।

वह बताती हैं कि सरपंच साहिब ने (पहले के) उनसे कहा कि सरपंच को अफसरों के साथ उठना-बैठना पड़ता है, इसलिए ढंग के कपड़े सिलवा लो। इसके लिए दो हजार रुपये दिए और यह कर्ज मेरे ऊपर चढ़ गया। हर रोज मुझे कभी थाने, कभी डीसी दफ्तर, कभी तहसीलदार, कभी बीडीओ के पास कार में बिठाकर ले जाते हैं। अंगूठा लगवाकर कह देते थे, हमें तो शहर में काम है आप बस में चली जाओ। बस का किराया तक नहीं देते। इस तरह चार महीनों में ही पांच हजार का कर्ज चढ़ गया। पहले महीने में आठ सौ रुपये मिल जाते थे। अब मैं उससे भी गई... कहते हुए सरपंच की आंखें भर आईं।

केस-2

और इन्होंने साबित कर दिया हम पुरुषों से कम नहीं

25 साल बाद उसी बठिंडा जिले के माणकखाना गांव की युवा सरपंच सेशनदीप कौर सिद्धू की अगुआई में गांव को दो नेशनल अवार्ड मिले हैं। पहला अवार्ड दीन दयाल उपाध्याय पंचायत सशक्तीकरण और दूसरा नानाजी देशमुख गौरव ग्राम सभा अवार्ड। बीएससी एग्रीकल्चर करके पहली बार सरपंच बनी सेशनदीप कौर सिद्धू ने मात्र दो तीन साल में ही अपने गांव को राष्ट्रीय पटल पर लाकर लंबे समय से स्थानीय निकायों की सत्ता पर काबिज रहने वाले पुरुषों को चुनौती दी है।

उन्होंने दिखा दिया कि महिलाओं को मौका मिले तो पुरुषों से कहीं ज्यादा बेहतर तरीके से अपने गांव की तस्वीर को संवार सकती हैं। सेशनदीप ने महिलाओं को इकट्ठा करके ग्राम सभा के संकल्प को चरितार्थ किया है और बताया कि असली ताकत उनके हाथों में है।

सेशनदीप बताती हैं कि ग्राम सभा में लोगों को बुलाना आसान काम नहीं है, इसलिए उन्होंने कभी पराली न जलाने वाले किसानों, कभी सबसे बड़े बुजुर्गों और कभी परीक्षाओं में अच्छे नंबर लेकर पास होने वाले बच्चों को सम्मानित करने के बहाने इकट्ठा किया। अब लोग इसका महत्व समझने लगे हैं। शहरों की तरह की कूड़ा कलेक्शन का सिस्टम बनाना, सभी को सूखा और गीला कूड़ा अलग-अलग इकट्ठा करने के बारे में जागरूक करना आदि सब समझ गए हैं।

दोनों केस स्टडी को देखकर यह बात अच्छी समझी जा सकती है कि महिलाओं को सिर्फ आरक्षण नहीं चाहिए, सशक्तीकरण चाहिए। वह पुरुषों से कहीं बेहतर साबित हो सकती हैं। सेशनदीप एकमात्र उदाहरण नहीं हैं। बठिंडा जिले का ही एक गांव है अकलिया कलां, जिनकी सरपंच ने अपने पांच साल के कार्यकाल में एक भी केस थाना, कचहरियों में नहीं जाने दिया। बल्कि खुद ही अपनी न्यायिक शक्तियों का इस्तेमाल करके सभी केसों का निपटारा गांव स्तर पर ही किया। यह कोई छोटी बात नहीं है।

हालांकि पूर्व प्रोजेक्ट डायरेक्ट साधू राम कुशला कहते हैं कि ज्यादातर जगह पर महिलाएं रबड़ स्टैंप की तरह ही होती हैं। उन्हें सशक्त करने के लिए आरक्षण एक औजार है लेकिन इसके साथ - साथ पढ़ा लिखा होना भी बहुत जरूरी है। मेशनदीप, साधू राम कुशला के इस विचार से सहमत हैं। वह कहती हैं कि अगर महिला पढ़ी- लिखी नहीं होगी तो पंचायत सेक्रेटरी से लेकर ऊपर तक की ब्यूरोक्रेसी उसे अपने तरीके से चलाएगी, जबकि संविधान ने उन्हें कई तरह की ताकतें दे रखी हैं। उन्हें योजनाओं के बारे में पता नहीं चलता। मेरा मानना है कि जिस तरह सिविल अधिकारियों को 15 से 30 दिन की ट्रेनिंग दी जाती है, इसी तरह की ट्रेनिंग दी जाए।

In Search Of Freedom From Loitering To Uproot The Exploitation

Priyanka Tupe

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They stepped out to experience freedom! At first out of their homes, then in their allies, and then further out; in the police station, in the Government office, and suddenly even in the hill station of Matheran with no one parenting them, except their own Ratna taai. While exploring the expanse of their freedom, they saw that it is not restricted only to their own. So what exactly did they do?

Bheem Nagar, the ghetto on the edge of the Mumbai suburb of Mankhurd, is besieged by sledge and mud all through the heavy monsoon. One would wonder if we are anywhere near a modern metropolis – let alone be a part of it, a labyrinth of seemingly endless rows of rundown, dilapidated housings along the overflowing sewage lines. Conspicuous by their absence are basic amenities like street lights, public toilets, any semblance of civic facilities. The Lumpen class residents of the area come from a diversity of castes and creeds with Dalits and Muslim predominance. Despite more than 75 years since our Independence, this part of the Mumbai Metro is waiting, striving to receive their share of basic electricity and water lines facilities to the household. The school children have to walk 4 kilometres to the nearby “Chita Camp” to fetch clean water for themselves and their families.

Says Pooja, “The moment we come home from school, we are meant to make a dash to get water – forget getting fresh or even change of clothes.” Says Fahim Muhammad, “It is even difficult for these girls of our area to go fetch the water. No street lights in the dark evenings. There are a bunch of drunks and druggies assembled on the roadside. We are even scared of going to classes on those by-lanes. Girls fear molestation or worse. Boys are afraid of mugging and other violent crimes.”

So in such encampment live the girls like Vandana Dongardive, Savita Pradhan, Kesar Shah, Alifia, Shah Jehan, Ruqzar Bano, Rolly and their friends Fahim Muhammad, Jaykish Vishwakarma, Vishal Chauhan and others. All these are between the ages of fourteen and twenty-two. They have formed a group of their own – they call it the “Power Group”. The Power Group helped these girls and women find a better life and earn their freedom to vent outside their house and out of the ghetto. The story of the likes of Vandana achieving their liberties is essential but equally important is the story of their friends helping them in the process, and together they understand and share the values of gender equality through the various initiatives and programs.

Story of the Anganwadi for Children that they started

Over the past four years, these young men and women of Bheem Nagar have come together through the ‘Yuva Mathan’ program of the CORO organisation. CORO has been an NGO active for the past 25 years in Maharashtra, specifically working for women empowerment and gender equality. It aims at developing leadership among economically struggling communities.

Among the main objectives for these young men and women are to work together to better their communities, creating a gender-equal environment. They hold their weekly meetings to discuss the immediate needs of their locality. They figured out the dire need for an Anganwadi for the local community during one such meeting. So the group conducted an area-wide door-to-door survey. A survey of 400 to 500 families to measure how many pregnant women, young – breastfeeding mothers, toddlers, undernourished teen girls there are in the community was conducted between December 10th to 15 of 2020. After completing the study, they corresponded with the state’s Women and Child Development department and shared the survey results with the Block Development Office. They sent a petition to start the Aanganwadi in BheemNagar and diligently followed up on the petition.

As a result, a Government-run Aanganwadi started on January 1st, 2021, in Bheemnagar. Kalpana Todkar is the official overseeing this Anganwadi. Ratna Mane, the community leader, says, "The Anganwadi is the hard work of these children. It is working efficiently. These young children are its overseers. I am just a witness to all this."

These young folks aged between fourteen to twenty-two years not only helped to start the first-ever Anganwadi in Bheemnagar, but they also made some substantial efforts about bringing electricity and water supply lines to the community. All these are school and college-going students of economically struggling classes. Through the common program for the community, their studies, their sports activities, they are also trying to learn and espouse gender equality.

It was evident that these young children had much better evolved in terms of gender equality thanks to their work with the CORO and their grassroots leader Ratna Mane.

Says Faheem, "We did not treat the Eunuchs with any respect in the past. We would ridicule them much like how others would.. After coming here to CORO, we realised they, too, are people like us."

Rolly, a 15 years old enthusiastic girl, shares her thoughts "I always loved to dance but there was no support for it from my family. Ever since I was connected with Power Group, I was able to pursue my hobbies."

Says Ruqsar Bano, "We used to face a lot of resistance at home about venturing out of home. 'Why should girls loiter out?' were the kind of questions we would deal with. But ever since our parents met Ratna taai, Abraar khalu, we are free to go anywhere. When we went to the hill station of Matheran, that was the first day in our lives that we experienced total freedom without anyone questioning anything. That feeling cannot be described in words."

Abraar khalu, the favourite uncle of these children, strives to create an environment so that these young boys and girls can mingle healthily and work together to address the community problems effectively. At the same time, values like gender equality and secularism are ingrained.

When I visited Bheem Nagar the first time, I met these young men and women at the residence of Abraar khalu, who has been associated with CORO for a few years. Mr. Abrar Salmani runs an "Ekta Welfare Association" initiative in Bheem Nagar that addresses local issues. A pleasant, smiling older man, Abraar khalu. A person with almost no primary education, the doors of his household and office are always open for the young people of Bheem Nagar. He sometimes feels overwhelmed witnessing the progress of these young people. He says, "When I arrived here years ago, there was nothing but mud here. We had to struggle for everything in this locality - we struggle even to this day. Sometimes it is the red-tape, and sometimes the local politics pose challenges. But thanks to CORO, these young people have become so efficient and smart. It is as if they are the ones who hold the keys for our area. Some of these girls who spoke about lack of basic facilities like electricity and water, those who gave 'Media Bytes' to some journalists, even received threatening calls from the local goons, but that did not deter them."

These tiny girls are fighting on multiple fronts, all simultaneously. Hailing from poverty, they deal with the patriarchy at home, even for their primary education. They are vulnerable to the elements on the street for their safety, yet their fight continues. Their spirits are high. Each of them aspires to be a doctor, teacher, or social worker. And in their budding teenage years, they are exploring the space for creativity, knowledge, and equality.

In all this struggle, we witness certain newfound confidence in them. How has it become possible? Mr. Rahul Gware, the head of the 'Yuwa Manthan program' at CORO, shared "We encourage them to solve their own problems. We provide all kinds of support including

scholarships , grass-root-level leadership etc. As regards Gender Equality, these young men and women learn it from the fact that no matter whether you are a boy or a girl, you have to fetch drinking water. But it is our aim to make sure this type of equality - the one which has arisen out of pure needs - is not the only Equality they know and follow. Our attempt is to make them see that at the basic level we are all equal no matter what our gender is. Community leaders like Ratna have made a tremendous impact on this program. Rather than delivering heavy lectures to them, she tries to propagate these principles through games and songs and music.”

Vandana, Kesar, Ruqsar, and all the young women from Bheem Nagar who are with them are not striving to earn their freedom only to loiter and mingle with boys - of course, these things are integral to their space. But they have the objective of putting their entire community on the path of progress. They are mindful of the freedom yet to be achieved for everyone - freedom from all kinds of exploitation, all types of darkness. I felt immensely inspired by the story of their freedom and was compelled to write this story about them.

I have no doubt left in my mind that these young women will never cease to work towards putting their entire struggling community on the path of freedom from exploitation, from the patriarchy, from the unfairness of the social structure surrounding them.

(Translated from Marathi to English)



STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY

The pandemic has put new and unforeseen pressures on all of us. Adding to that, there are the pre-existing social and economic burdens and personal trauma that people are dealing with. Yet, in such a time of unprecedented struggle and upheaval, some people have shown exemplary resilience and strength. Stories in this section highlight breaking barriers, change and courage before, during and following the aftermath of the pandemic.

Grassroot governance is always given an extra thrust, when women are elected to panchayats and bring women-centric reforms to the forefront. Ranchi based Puja Singh, has highlighted in her article, 'महिला मुखिया ने बदली बाराम पंचायत की तस्वीर', how Anju Kujur, the panchayat head, has worked tirelessly towards literacy, connecting youth with employment and getting couples married who are in a live-in relationship. Puja, in her Hindi article, 'गांवों की सरकार में 60% महिलाएं, बदल रही तस्वीर', has also highlighted the changes brought forward by women who have won the panchayat election. In her article, Vijay Sharma, a writer from Ghaziabad, in his article 'सशक्त पंचायती से होगा क्षेत्र का कायाकल्प', has highlighted the story of Aarti Tiwari, who became the youngest District Panchayat member from Chaudharydih ward of Balrampur district. The article highlights how she won the election and her high priority development plans. Under the same umbrella is another article by Delhi based Poorvi Gupta, 'Here's How Haryana's Youngest Female Sarpanch Spent Five Years In Power,' where the story of Rekha Rani is brought to the fore. Twenty-one-year-old Rekha Rani became the Sarpanch of her village, Chapla Mori, in Fatehabad district in Haryana. She was one of the few women in the town who was from an SC/ST background with the necessary educational qualification as mandated by the State Election Commission.

Vijay Kumar Sharma, in his article, 'कोविड- 19 आभासी दुनिया के वास्तविक युवा योद्धा', has brought to the fore youth who provided immense help by becoming virtual volunteers/warriors when the second wave of Coronavirus hit the nation. Their stories of reaching out to help patients and their families through social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, and Telegraph are reported. Shahina KK, from Kerala, has also showcased social volunteers in Kerala in her article, 'How Kerala is nurturing young volunteers for crisis'. The Social Volunteer Force was set up after the devastating floods of 2018, and today it is a 3.78 lakh strong team, which has reached out to the needy during the pandemic.

'Pandemic & Burden Of Caregiving: How Women Fought All Odds To Continue Taking Care Of The Sick', an article by Aritra Bhattacharya, gives an account of two women and the challenges they faced during the pandemic as primary caregivers. Attention is drawn to the lack of spaces for collective grieving for caregivers and families faced with death and the need for more mental health volunteers to whom people can reach out.

Thousands Of Tribal Women Chart Their Future After Vocational Training' written by freelance writer Madhav Sharma, is about 4,300 women in the Dungarpur and Banswara districts of Rajasthan. They have become self-reliant and set up their enterprises after undergoing skill development training offered by the Dungarpur Municipal Council and local non-profits. Until some years ago, they had not even stepped out of their houses, and today they are travelling all by themselves to big cities like Delhi to sell their goods.

Jyoti Yadav, in her article, 'Education By Girls, For Girls – How Ayodhya Group Is Helping Students Stay In School, College', highlights the initiatives of girls who have set up study centres in Ayodhya for girls to prevent them from dropping out of the education system in the absence of regular classes or digital access. To incentivize participation, girls are also taught sewing at the centres. Yet another powerful article by Jyoti Yadav, 'Don't Want To Live Like A Victim – How A Women's Adalat In UP Is Empowering Survivors Of Abuse', showcases the great work done by Chingari Adalat – a women's self-help group in

empowering women about their rights and talking about issues like domestic violence and sexual abuse faced by them.

India has reported 10,677 deaths by suicide in the farming sector during 2020, accounting for 7% of total such demises in the country according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data. The leading causes of such a harsh step are debt, family problems, and crop failure. However, little is known about what happens to the farmer's family after his death by suicide. Inderpreet Singh has in his Hindi article, 'पंजाब में निराश किसानों व मजदूरों के परिवारों के लिए आशा की 'किरण', यूँ लड़ रही है हक हकूक की लड़ाई' has featured the work of Kiranjeet, the daughter of a farmer who ended his life. She has formed an organization named 'Pind Bachao, Punjab Bachao', which helps destitute wives and supports the education of children of farmers and labourers who have died because of suicide.

महिला मुखिया ने बदली बड़ाम पंचायत की तस्वीर

पूजा सिंह

13 अप्रैल 2021, प्रभात खबर

नामकुम प्रखंड के बड़ाम पंचायत की तस्वीर समय के साथ काफी बदल रही है। पंचायत की महिला मुखिया अंजु कुजूर ने अपने पंचायत के लोगों के लिए मूलभूत सुविधा उपलब्ध कराने से लेकर निरक्षरों को साक्षर बनाया, ढुकुवा जीवन जी रहे जोड़ों का विवाह कराया, रोजगार से युवाओं को जोड़ने से लेकर कई कार्य की है। श्रीमति कुजूर ने बताया कि बड़ाम पंचायत में 6000 से अधिक लोग रहते हैं। इस गांव को खुले में शौच मुक्त बनाने का काम किये साथ ही आवास, रोजगार की व्यवस्था जैसे मूलभूत कार्य तो किये ही, साथ ही गांव में ढुकुवा तरीके से रहने वाले जोड़ों (बिना शादी के रहने वाले जोड़े) का विवाह कराकर उन्हें समाज में रहने का दर्जा दिलाये। इस कार्य के अंतर्गत अपने पंचायत व बाहर के करीब 250 लोगों का विवाह कराये। अपने पंचायत के बच्चों से लेकर बड़े, बुजुर्ग, महिला को साक्षर करने का भी बीड़ा उठाया। गांव में शिक्षक रख कर निरक्षर से साक्षर कर आत्म निर्भर करने का प्रयास भी किये है। साथ ही रोजगार के लिए कौशल विकास के तहत युवाओं को जोड़ कर ट्रेनिंग मुहैया।

कराने का भी कार्य किये है। इस पंचायत को परिमल नाथवानी जी ने गोद लेकर गांव तस्वीर बदलने में काफी सहायता प्रदान की।

केस स्टडी: मैं माही आर्थिक स्थिति ठीक न होने के कारण पति गुड्डू बैक के साथ बिना शादी के पांच सालों से रहने को मजबूर थी। लेकिन तीन साल पहले 2018 में मुखिया की पहल से हमें समाज में सर उठा का जीने की राह दिलायी। शादी कराकर प्रमाण पत्र भी दिलाया। जिससे हम सामाजिक तौर पर पति पत्नी के रूप में रह रहे हैं। अब दोनों मिल कर मशरूम की खेती कर अपना जीवन यापन कर रहे हैं।

मुखिया ने गांव को बनाया एलोवेरा विलेज:

नगड़ी ब्लॉक के देवरी पंचायत वर्तमान में एलोवेरा विलेज के नाम से भी जाना जाता है। इसके श्रेय में उस पंचायत की महिला मुखिया मंजु कच्छप को भी जाता है। जिन्होंने बीएयू से एलोवेरा खेती के बारे में जानकर अपने ग्राम की महिलाओं को इस रोजगार से जोड़ने का प्रयास की। श्रीमती कच्छप ने बताया कि सरकारी योजना का लाभ गांव के लोगों तक पहुंचाने का प्रयास तो किये हैं। साथ ही साथ अपने गांव की महिला गृहणियों को रोजगार से जोड़ कर आत्मनिर्भर बनाने का भी प्रयास किये है। इसके लिए बीएयू के सहयोग से एलोवेरा पौधा लेकर उसके खेती के बारे में जाना। जिससे गांव की महिलाओं को करने के लिए जागरूक की। आज गृहणियां हैं, जो मूल रूप से एलोवेरा खेती से ही जुड़ी है। जिससे उन्हें सालों भर इनकम हो पाता है। इस गांव को एलोवेरा विलेज के नाम से भी जाना जाता है। गृहणियों के अलावा कई किसान भी अपने खेत के में एलोवेरा लगा कर इनकम कर रहे हैं। एलोवेरा लगाने से लेकर उन्हें मार्केट उपलब्ध कराने का काम किये ताकि उन्हें आर्थिक मदद मिल सके।

केस स्टडी: भगमनी तिकी ने बताया कि मुखिया के माध्यम से बीएयू में एलोवेरा खेती के बारे में सात दिनों की ट्रेनिंग लिये। जहां से हमें 50 पौधा मिला। इस पौधे को 2018 में अपने खेत में लगाये और आज 3000 से अधिक एलोवेरा पौधा तैयार हो चुका है। इसके पत्ते 35-50 रुपये प्रति किलो बिक रहे हैं। दिनों दिन डिमांड इसकी काफी बढ़ती जा रही है। अब इस रोजगार में ही आगे बढ़ना है। क्योंकि मेहनत कम और इनकम ज्यादा है। मुखिया ने हम जैसे कई महिला गृहणियों को रोजगार से जोड़ने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभायी।

विलुप्त होते हेसातु गांव को पहुंचायी सरकारी सुविधा:

ओरमांडी प्रखंड के गगरी पंचायत अंतर्गत हेसातु गांव जहां करीब 105 घर हैं। वह गांव सरकारी योजना से पूरी तरह से वंचित था। उस गांव को महिला मुखिया सीता देवी ने मुख्य धारा से जोड़ कर सुविधा पहुंचाने की ठानी। वह बताती है कि अपने पंचायत में मूलभूत सुविधा उपलब्ध कराने से लेकर हेसातु गांव जहां करीब 500-600 लोग रहते हैं। उन तक सुविधा पहुंचाने का कार्य मुखिया बनते ही शुरू किये। उस गांव के लोगों को केवल जनगणना और चुनाव के समय ही याद किया जाता था। तब इस गांव को सरकारी योजना से जोड़ने के लिए नये प्रधान का चुनाव कर सामान्य गांव की श्रेणी में लाने का प्रयास किये। इंदिरा आवास का सर्वे कराये, रोड, बिजली की सुविधा घर घर तक पहुंचाने का प्रयास किये। महिला समिति का गठन कर महिलाओं को आत्मनिर्भर बनाने की कोशिश किये। कैम्प लगाकर उनका खाता खोलवाने से लेकर राशन कार्ड तक बनावाये ताकि गांव के लोगों को सरकारी लाभ मिल सके। साथ ही महिलाओं को टपक खेती से जोड़े ताकि वह आत्मनिर्भर बन सके।

चकला पंचायत में कोरोना टीका लगाने के लिए जागरूक कर रही मुखिया

रांची से महज 20 किलोमीटर की दूरी पर चकला पंचायत है। चकला पंचायत की मुखिया बीना देवी ने पंचायत क्षेत्र में विकास के लिए कई कार्य किये। उनकी खासियत ये है कि किसी भी समस्या की सूचना मिलने पर फोन आते ही।

स्कूटी लेकर घटनास्थल पहुंच जाती है। चकला पंचायत की आबादी पांच लाख छह हजार है। वह बताती हैं कि जब पहली बार चुनाव जीतकर मुखिया बने तो क्षेत्र की समस्या चुनौती भरा था। यहा सबसे पहले रोड़, पानी बिजली, शौचालय का काम किये। ग्रामीणों के समर्थन से 500 शौचालय का निर्माण कराया। इसके अलावा जिन गांवों में आवश्यकता के अनुसार रोड़ को प्राथमिकता दिया। मनरेगा का काम में शत-प्रतिशत काम कराया। लॉक डाउन में घर-घर जाकर राशन, मास्क, सैनिटाइजर का वितरण किये। इसके अलावा बाहर काम करने गये उन लोगों को वापस आने पर राशन, रहने, खाने का व्यवस्था करवाये। आज के समय में महिलाओं को जागरूक किये की अपनी परेशानी को लेकर आगे आये। अब महिलायें जो भी समस्याएं हैं बेहिचक पंचायत आकर रखती हैं। और समाधान भी होता है। अब कोरोना को लेकर प्रत्येक ग्रामीणों को कोरोना टीका के लिए प्रेरित कर टीकाकरण केंद्र भेज रहे हैं ताकी हमारा पंचायत कोरोना मुक्त हो सके।

गांवों की सरकार में 60% महिलाएं, बदल रही तस्वीर

पूजा सिंह

21 सितम्बर 2021, प्रभात खबर

रांची : पंचायत में महिला मुखिया ने आकर गांव की दशा और दिशा दोनों बदलने में मदद की है. घर परिवार की जिम्मेदारी के साथ अब पंचायत की रूप रेखा बदल रही है। पंचायत चुनाव की बात करें तो वर्ष 2015 के पंचायत चुनाव में करीब 60 फीसदी महिलाएं जीत कर मुखिया बनी थीं। अपने आरक्षित सीटों 50 फीसदी से करीब 10 फीसदी अधिक सीटों पर वे काबिज होने में सफल रहीं। यानी अपनी आरक्षित सीटों पर तो उनका हक रहा ही, जो सामान्य सीटें थीं, उनमें भी पुरुष प्रतिद्वंदियों को हरा कर उन्होंने जीत दर्ज करायी। इस तरह 4398 मुखिया में से करीब 2640 पंचायतों में महिलाएं मुखिया बन कर गांवों की सरकार में आयीं। इसके बाद से वे गांवों की दशा और दिशा बदलने में लगी हैं।

पंचायत चुनाव होने की तैयारी

अब फिर से पंचायत चुनाव होने की उम्मीद जगी है। इस चुनाव के लिए भी उन्होंने कमर कसने शुरू भी कर दी है। इस बार अनुमान लगाया जा रहा है कि 60 फीसदी से भी अधिक सीटों पर महिलाएं काबिज होने में सफल हो सकती हैं। 50 फीसदी की आरक्षित सीटों के अलावा करीब 15-20 फीसदी अधिक सीटें उनके झोली में जा सकती है।

2010 में हुआ चुनाव

मुखियाओं ने बताया कि सबसे पहले वर्ष 2010 में झारखंड में पंचायत चुनाव हुआ। तब 50 फीसदी आरक्षित सीटों पर ही उनकी जीत हुई। पहली बार वह सशक्त रूप से सामने नहीं आयीं थीं। इस तरह गांवों की सरकार में उनकी बराबरी की हिस्सेदारी रही, लेकिन जब पांच साल बाद पुनः 2015 में पंचायत चुनाव हुआ, तो रोस्टर के मुताबिक उनकी सीटें बदलीं। उनकी सीटें सामान्य के लिए हो गयीं। यानी इसमें पुरुष-महिला कोई भी चुनाव लड़ सकता था। ऐसे में महिलाएं पीछे नहीं हटीं। अपने पुराने परफोरमेंस के आधार पर सामान्य सीटों पर चुनाव लड़ीं और ऐसी 10 फीसदी सीटों पर जीत हासिल की। 50 फीसदी सीटें तो उनका आरक्षित रहा ही। इस तरह 60 फीसदी सीटें उनकी रही। इस बार फिर रोस्टर में जिन महिलाओं का सीट सामान्य होगा, उन सीटों पर चुनाव लड़ने को उन्होंने कमर कस रखी है। उनका बेहतर प्रदर्शन भी रहा है, जिसके आधार पर फिर जनता के बीच जाने की तैयारी है। ऐसे में अनुमान है कि इस बार गांवों की सरकार में उनके प्रतिनिधित्व का प्रतिशत बढ़ेगा। इस बार कई महिला प्रतिनिधि हैट्रिक की तैयारी में हैं।

सामाजिक-आर्थिक मुद्दों में भी दखल

महिला मुखिया का पंचायतों के सामाजिक और आर्थिक मुद्दों पर भी दखल है। वे अपने पदों का इस्तेमाल कर सामाजिक कुरीतियों को दूर करने में लगी हैं। महिलाओं व अन्य के आर्थिक विकास को लेकर प्रयासरत हैं। उनके नेतृत्व में पूरे पंचायतों का विकास हो रहा है। लोगों को न्याय दिला रही हैं। आगे बढ़ने के लिए गांव और ग्रामवासियों के लिए मार्गदर्शन भी तय हो रहे हैं। गांवों में बदला सा माहौल है। हर छोटे-बड़े मामलों में उनका दखल है। गांव में क्या काम कराना है और किस तरह काम होना है। इस पर प्रत्यक्ष रूप से वे भागीदारी निभा रही हैं। कोरोना काल में भी मुखिया का अलग रूप देखने को मिला। लोगों की मदद करने से लेकर वैक्सिनेशन के लिए भी जागरूक करती नज़र आयी। रोजगार मुहैया कराने में भी मदद की।

महिला मुखिया ने कहा

“महिला मुखिया ने पंचायत स्तर पर काफी काम किया है। मैंने भी अपने पंचायत में काफी कार्य किये हैं। कोरोना काल में लोगों की मदद से लेकर वैक्सिनेशन के लिए जागरूक किये। गांव में वैक्सिनेशन कैंप लगाये जिससे वर्तमान में 75 प्रतिशत से अधिक लोग वैक्सिन ले चुके हैं। इस बार होने वाले पंचायत चुनाव की विशेष तैयारी है। तीसरी बार चुनाव जीत कर गांव से पलायन को रोकने के लिए कार्य करना है और मनरेगा से लोगों को जोड़ना है।”

- सीमा कुमारी गोंझू, सिल्ली पंचायत मुखिया

“कोरोना काल में पंचायत स्तर पर काफी काम किये। लोगों की मदद करने से लेकर हर घर को सेनिटाइज कराते रहे। यहां तक की वैक्सिनेशन के लिए लोगों को जागरूक करने के साथ कैंप लगवाये। अब तक 50 प्रतिशत से अधिक ग्रामीणों ने वैक्सिन लिया है। अब चुनाव के लिए भी तैयारी करनी है। इस बार चुनाव जीत कर ग्रामीण महिलाओं के रोजगार और आगे बढ़ाने के लिए कार्य करने की कोशिश होगी। ताकि महिलाओं की भागीदारी बढ़ेगी।”

- सीता देवी, गगारी पंचायत मुखिया

सशक्त पंचायतों से होगा क्षेत्र का कायाकल्प

विजय शर्मा

15 अगस्त 2021, दैनिक तरुण मित्र

उत्तरप्रदेश में सबसे कम उम्र की जिला पंचायत अध्यक्ष आरती तिवारी ने अपना मिशन और विजन साझा किया है। आरती अब अपने जिले में पंचायतों का कायाकल्प करने को तैयार हैं। उनका कहना है कि युवा राजनीति में आएंगे तो राजनीति और जनता दोनों का भला होगा। वरिष्ठ पत्रकार विजय शर्मा ने उनसे विस्तार से बात की। “हमारे जिले के ज्यादातर गाँव काफी पिछड़े हुए हैं और जिला मुख्यालय से सीधे नहीं जुड़े हुए हैं। मेरे गाँव से सरकारी अस्पताल नौ किलोमीटर दूर है, जबकि स्कूल पांच किमी की दूरी पर है। स्वास्थ्य और शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में काफी काम करने की जरूरत है। साक्षरता बहुत कम है और अपने कार्यकाल में यह कोशिश करूँगी कि हर लड़की को शिक्षा मिले। प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के “बेटी बचाओ-बेटी पढ़ाओ” और “पढ़ें बेटियाँ - बड़े बेटियाँ” जैसे नारे को साकार करना ही होगा। साथ ही सभी गाँवों में सड़क और स्वास्थ्य का बेहतर ढांचा विकसित करेंगे। उत्साह और आत्मविश्वास से भरी हुई यह बातें उत्तरप्रदेश के बलरामपुर की नई और युवा जिला पंचायत अध्यक्ष आरती तिवारी ने कही हैं। इस पद पर उनका चयन छात्र-छात्राओं और महिलाओं के लिए एक मिसाल की तरह है। इससे पहले तक आरती ने कभी राजनीति के बारे में कुछ सोचा नहीं था लेकिन परिवार की राजनीतिक-सामाजिक विरासत को जब उनकी जरूरत पड़ी तो वह खुद को रोक नहीं सकीं। पद संभालने के बाद ही उन्होंने स्नातक अंतिम वर्ष की परीक्षा दी और अब राजनीतिक जिम्मेदारियों के निर्वहन को तैयार हैं।

आरती बताती हैं कि “मेरे पिता प्रधान रहे हैं लेकिन ठीक से पढ़-लिख नहीं पाये। वह एक सामान्य किसान हैं लेकिन उन्होंने हमेशा लड़कियों की शिक्षित करने पर जोर दिया। इसी वजह से अपने पूरे परिवार में अभी तक स्नातक की परीक्षा देने वाली मैं अकेली हूँ। मेरी कोशिश होगी कि धन के अभाव में किसी मेधावी बच्चे की पढ़ाई न रुकने पाये। परिषदीय स्कूलों को माँडर्न बनाने के प्रयास होंगे। जो अभिभावक स्कूल की दूरी, आर्थिक अभाव या अन्य समस्याओं की वजह से लड़कियों को स्कूल नहीं भेज रहे हैं, उनसे हम मिलेंगे और काउंसलिंग करेगे। जिले की प्रथम नागरिक आरती तिवारी अपने सहपाठियों के बीच भी कौतूहल का विषय है, जिन्हें विश्वास ही नहीं हो रहा कि कल तक जो उनके साथ कैम्पस और क्लॉस में साथ थी, आज एक बड़ी जिम्मेदारी से जुड़ गई है। नारी सशक्तिकरण में विश्वास में रखने वाली आरती ने इस नये दायित्व के साथ-साथ आगे उच्च शिक्षा जारी रखने की बात कही है। इस बारे में वह परिवार और वरिष्ठ पदाधिकारियों से राय लेंगी।

आरती के चुनाव के पीछे एक दिलचस्प घटनाक्रम है। उनके चाचा और बीजेपी के पुराने कार्यकर्ता श्याम मनोहर तिवारी ने चौधरीडीह वार्ड से जिला पंचायत सदस्य का पर्चा दाखिल करने से ठीक पहले अचानक आरती को ही मैदान में उतार दिया। क्षेत्र में उनकी पैठ का लाभ आरती को मिला और करीब आठ हजार वोटों से चुनाव जीतकर प्रदेश की सबसे कम उम्र की जिला पंचायत सदस्य बन गईं। जब जिला पंचायत अध्यक्ष के चुनाव की बारी आई तो बीजेपी ने तमाम राजनीतिक समीकरणों को देखते हुए प्रदेश मुख्यालय जिन चार नामों को भेजा उनमें एक नाम आरती का भी था। पार्टी ने भी नये चेहरे, युवा और एक छात्रा होने के नाते आरती पर ही विश्वास किया। यह पद सामान्य महिला के लिए आरक्षित था।

आरती के मुताबिक, “मेरे चाचा एक समाजसेवी हैं जिससे हमें लोगों के लिए कुछ करने की प्रेरणा मिलती है। उन्होंने कुछ सोचकर ही मुझे चुनाव लड़ने के लिए प्रेरित किया। मुझे विश्वास है कि अब मैं उनकी और मतदाताओं की अपेक्षा के अनुरूप अपने क्षेत्र ही नहीं, पूरे जिले में बड़ा बदलाव लाने में लाने में सक्षम होऊँगी। पंचायतों को क्षेत्र के कायाकल्प के लिए तैयार करेंगे। विकास ही एकमात्र एजेंडा है। जो क्षेत्र इससे अछूते हैं, वहाँ काम होगा। कोशिश होगी कि जिला पंचायत सदस्य की सीटों पर जीते सभी प्रत्याशियों के क्षेत्रों का बराबर विकास हो।

आज से चौबीस साल पहले अलग जिला बने बलरामपुर की कुल आबादी सरकारी आंकड़ों के हिसाब से बाइस लाख के आसपास है लेकिन नब्बे प्रतिशत से ज्यादा आबादी कुल आठ सौ गाँवों में रहती है। ऐसे में यहाँ गाँवों की सरकार चुने जाने के दौरान काफी सरगर्मियाँ रहीं। नवगठित जिला पंचायत बोर्ड में भी जिला पंचायत अध्यक्ष समेत 90 प्रतिशत सदस्य युवा हैं। इसी के साथ आरती के नाम इस बार यूपी की सबसे कम उम्र की जिला पंचायत अध्यक्ष बनने का रिकॉर्ड भी दर्ज हो गया है।

यह पूछने पर कि अब आपके साथ जिले के कई अधिकारी और वरिष्ठ नेता भी सलाहकार के तौर पर जुड़ेंगे, जो आपसे उम्र में भी बड़े होंगे। ऐसे में कोई दिक्कत तो नहीं आएगी? आरती का कहना है कि, “मुझे किसी तरह दिक्कत नहीं हो रही है। सभी का पूरा सहयोग और स्नेह मिल रहा है। आरती कहती हैं कि, “हम एक मकसद से राजनीति में आये हैं। नौकरी करके हम जनता के लिए कुछ भी नहीं कर सकते हैं। अगर हमारे जैसे युवा राजनीति में आएंगे तो राजनीति और जनता दोनों का भला होगा। मैं खुद पंचायती राज व्यवस्था के बारे में गहराई से अध्ययन कर रही हूँ और कोशिश करूँगी कि पंचायती राज अधिनियम और हमारे राजनीतिक पथप्रदर्शकों की भावना के अनुरूप इसे लागू कर सकूँ। हमने समाज के प्रति अपने दायित्वों के निर्वहन का संकल्प लिया है। जो जिम्मेदारी पार्टी, वरिष्ठ नेताओं और जनप्रतिनिधियों ने सौंपी है उस पर खरा उतरने का प्रयास करूँगी।

यूपी में इस बार पंचायतों में महिलाओं की भागीदारी बढ़ी है। लगभग 54 प्रतिशत महिलाएं प्रधान, इतनी ही ब्लॉक प्रमुख 56 प्रतिशत महिलाएं जिला पंचायत अध्यक्ष बनी हैं। इस तरह पंचायतों में महिला प्रतिनिधित्व 53.7 प्रतिशत है, जो मौजूदा एक तिहाई आरक्षण कोटे से भी अधिक है। ध्यातव्य है कि जिला पंचायत पूरे जिले की समस्याओं और आवश्यकताओं की समीक्षा कर प्राथमिकताओं के आधार पर एक जिला योजना तैयार करती है और जिला योजना में स्वीकृत कार्यों या योजनाओं को क्रियान्वित किया जाता है। जिला परिषद एक तरह से गांवों की मुख्य सरकार ही होती है जिसके नियंत्रण में ग्राम पंचायत से लेकर क्षेत्र पंचायत भी होती है। त्रिस्तरीय पंचायती राज व्यवस्था के तहत जिला पंचायत को काफी अधिकार प्रदान किए गए हैं। विधायक और सांसद भी जिला पंचायत से सीधे जुड़े होते हैं।

Here's How Haryana's Youngest Female Sarpanch Spent Five Years In Power

Poorvi Gupta

26 August, 2021, yourstory.com/herstory

Twenty-one-year-old Rekha Rani became the Sarpanch of her village Chapla Mori in Fatehabad district in Haryana as she was one of the few women in the village with the necessary educational qualification.

Rekha Rani was just 21-years-old when she became the Sarpanch of her village Chapla Mori in Fatehabad district in the Haryana hinterland in 2016. It was for the first time that Chapla Mori was going to have its own Gram Panchayat separate from Dhani Miyankhan and Salam Khera, which had been the case for decades. The state election commission had made it mandatory for Chapla Mori to have a female Sarpanch from SC/ST background who had educational qualification up till eighth grade.

Rekha, who had completed school, was the only woman in the hamlet ticking all the boxes, and hence the elders (men) in the village decided that she would hold the post. When this decision was made, she was still a few days short of the legal age of becoming a Sarpanch, and was working in a Burger King franchise in Chandigarh.

Rekha Rani in her village in Haryana

Rekha lucked out in becoming a Sarpanch as she was one of the few women in the village with the necessary educational qualification, and there's a reason for it. Her village, even to this day, only has a primary-level school, and to study further, children are forced to travel to Bighar, a neighbouring village almost five kilometres away with no proper road infrastructure. Add to it, the regressive and patriarchal social construct of a typical Haryana village that consistently subjugates its women. However, belonging to a comparatively progressively family, Rekha was allowed to study further.

"I would go to Bighar on a cycle, which would take me at least half an hour to and fro to attend school. There was hardly any other girl accompanying me a few years ago, so the journey would be lonesome, but I wanted to study as much as I could," Rekha says.

"I was good at studies, but my family didn't have enough money to let me study further. Hence, I had to quit studies after I passed Class 12 and look for employment opportunities," adds Rekha, who went on to do vocational training under Deen Dyal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana after which she got a job at Burger King in Chandigarh in 2015. At that time, her father Bansi Lal, a farm labourer, was the sole breadwinner in the family.

This was the first time Rekha stepped out of her house to move to not just a different village, but a city altogether. "I learnt how to be responsible for myself when I moved to Chandigarh. I felt I could make decisions for myself without any intervention, and that my parents trusted me enough to send me to a far-away city. I really liked that. In Chandigarh, I loved how people communicated with each other," reminisced Rekha. Her journey inspired many families in her village to educate their girls and send them out for work too.

At the tail end of her first month at work, Rekha's first salary of Rs 10,600, minus the Provident Fund (PF) was handed out to her. She returned home after two months in service and gave away Rs 10,000 to her parents that she had saved after paying for her essential expenses.

Change in the village

During this time, her father told her that she must file her nomination for Sarpanch in October 2015. She contested against Nirmal Rani and won the elections by 220 votes after polling 610 votes. Rekha's mother Krishna Devi was the happiest after she became the Sarpanch. "She has made me proud for the coming three generations and changed the lives of everyone in the family," said Devi, adding that it was only after Rekha became

Sarpanch, we could build a house for ourselves. However, due to the pandemic, the house continues to be under-construction.

"I continued my job in Chandigarh after becoming the Sarpanch for two years as our Gram Panchayat was new and there wasn't much work. But slowly, the village locals started to object that every time my signatures were required for official work, they had to wait for me, so I quit my job in 2017 and moved back to the village for good," says Rekha.

Despite becoming a Sarpanch, Rekha took some time in settling down, while her father primarily tended to the duties. While she would go with him when the panchayat convened, she was hardly the decision-maker. In cases of conflict resolution, Rekha's position didn't help much as the male elders of the village proved their dominance.

During her tenure, which ended early this year, she may not have drastically improved the quality of villagers' lives as she claimed at the beginning as the government school in the village continues to be a primary school teaching students only from pre-nursery to Class 5. But she built two sheds and managed some repair work of the roads.

Women don't stand a chance in gender agnostic elections

While Rekha and the villagers agree that her becoming a Sarpanch is a major push for other women to become a Sarpanch in the future, when pestered on whether she would have a chance if the elections were on a common gender ground between men and women, Rekha hesitatingly says,

"If I was to contest against a male candidate, I wouldn't even have a chance to contest. Maybe things will change in the future. Maybe men will think that women should also be given a chance to become a Sarpanch if the elections were to be gender agnostic."

Asmani Devi, an anganwadi worker from Chapla Mori, feels proud that a woman became a Sarpanch in her village. "We see a whole lot of progress of women in the village in comparison to the past. But still women can't possibly become a Sarpanch if there is no reservation."

One of the elders in the village, Hanuman Bishnoi (70), believes girls in the village don't get as many opportunities to study more as men do. "We don't have a proper higher secondary school in the village for girls to study. Boys take their motorcycles to study in other villages, but girls can't. But if girls get better opportunities to study, they will do better than boys as they are more disciplined," says Bishnoi.

History is witness to the fact that Haryana Gram Panchayat elections haven't seen a woman win Sarpanch elections from general category where there is no reservation. Although it cannot be said with surety, women hardly ever even contested against male candidates in Gram Panchayat elections.

Whatever change has come for women to join the governance is through the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution in April 1993. However, close to three decades have passed, but the on-ground reality has hardly seen any difference. Women may now become a Sarpanch on paper, they are almost never the showrunners, it is mostly overseen by their immediate male family member – in Rekha's case, it was her father.

Dr. Santosh Dahiya, national coordinator of Sarv Jaatiya Sarv Khap Mahila Mahapanchayat, has been working with women Sarpanch for over a decade now. "Women who are compelled to become Sarpanch out of reservation don't take their jobs as seriously as those who show a passion to contest elections and then become Sarpanch. Contesting elections fair and square is also a huge part of the process, it tells you what you have earned and how to use that position but women who are served the position on a platter don't value it," shares Dahiya.

She further expounds that some women who become a Sarpanch without any hustle do feel motivated to contest in the election again when there's a reservation, but the percentage of such women is miniscule. "It's mostly their husbands, father or brother who do most of the work, while in some cases women don't even leave their rooms, let alone houses."

On whether women can contest in general Gram Panchayat elections, she denied squarely. "Men just won't let women contest elections if the seat isn't reserved for women and they just can't have it. Currently, there's a very small percentage of men who will allow women in their family to even contest in the elections even if the seat is reserved for women," she added.

However, Dahiya believes that even forced women's participation in Panchayat elections is important

"Women may become Sarpanch for whatever reason, but at some point they have to meet people because of the position they hold and that pushes them out of their comfort zone. It also motivates other women around them to contest elections the next time who may think they can better manage the post of a Sarpanch than the woman before them. So there definitely are some positive outcomes to it as well."

While stories like those of Rekha are inspiring and encouraging, we must understand the real and grassroots change it brings. If at all there is any change in the mentality of the people on how they view their women and their representation, or is it just on papers that the representation of women sarpanch is growing in the state of Haryana?

कोविड-19 आभासी दुनिया के वास्तविक युवा योद्धा

विजय शर्मा

21 जून 2021, दैनिक तरुण मित्र

कोरोना की दूसरी लहर के दौरान देश के कई नौजवान बने वर्चुअल वालंटियर्स। सोशल मीडिया प्लेटफॉर्म व्हाट्सएप, ट्विटर, इंस्टाग्राम और टेलीग्राम के जरिये पीड़ितों तक मदद पहुंचाकर सामाजिक दायित्व की अनूठी मिसाल कायम की। अब तीसरी लहर से निपटने की है तैयारी।

भारत में स्वास्थ्य और चिकित्सा से जुड़े मुद्दे अक्सर मुख्यधारा के विमर्श में जगह नहीं बना पाते। हम तब जागते हैं जब पानी सिर से ऊपर जाने लगे। कोरोना की दूसरी लहर के अनुमान में चूक का नतीजा बेहद त्रासदपूर्ण रहा। इस दौरान बची-खुची स्वास्थ्य और चिकित्सा व्यवस्था भी चरमरा गई और बहुत से लोग इलाज के अभाव में जान से हाथ धो बैठे। ऑक्सीजन, वेंटिलेटर, इंजेक्शन, प्लाज्मा, एंबुलेंस, दवाई व दूसरी व्यवस्थाएं ठप्प हो गईं, सरकारी और निजी अस्पतालों में जैसे-तैसे जगह पाये मरीजों और घरों में क्वारंटीन रहे लोगों में इलाज के साथ-साथ पौष्टिक भोजन की चुनौती बनी रही। आज भी कोविड-19 से उपजे हालात से हम पूरी तरह बाहर नहीं आ सके हैं और अब कथित 'तीसरी लहर' का साया मंडरा रहा है। वैक्सीनेशन के लिए मारामारी तो अभी तक पूरी तरह नहीं थमी है।

इतने विपरीत माहौल में जब लोग डरे-सहमे घरों में दुबके हुए थे तभी कई युवाओं ने मरीजों तक राहत पहुंचाने की जिम्मेदारी संभाली और सीमित संसाधनों से यथासंभव उसे निभाया भी। उत्तर भारत के कई छात्र-छात्रा ओटीटी, मोबाइल गेम और यू-ट्यूब छोड़ कर स्वयं आगे आये और अलग-अलग डिजिटल प्लेटफॉर्म पर ग्रुप बनाकर कोविड-19 से युद्ध के लिए मैदान में कूद पड़े। इन युवाओं ने कोरोना के खिलाफ जंग में अपने मोबाइल को ही अपना हथियार बना लिया। देश भर में ऐसी कई अभियान आज भी जारी हैं। आइये मिलते हैं कुछ ऐसे ही युवा वर्चुअल वॉरियर्स से।

सोनाली केसरी, कोविड हेल्पिंग हैंड्स ग्रुप, दिल्ली

सोनाली एक कार्टूनिस्ट है, डांसर है और कविताएं भी लिखती हैं। समाज सेवा उसके खून में है और कोविड-19 की खतरनाक 'दूसरी लहर' के दौरान उसने एक अनूठी मिसाल कायम की। पश्चिम बंगाल के आसनसोल जिले के जमड़िया कस्बे की रहने वाली और नोएडा के एक कॉलेज की छात्रा सोनाली केसरी ने दिल्ली-एनसीआर में कोरोना पीड़ितों के लिए ऐसी मुहिम शुरू की जिससे सैकड़ों मरीजों को मुश्किल वक्त में राहत मिली। सोनाली के 'कोविड हेल्पिंग हैंड्स' से 20-25 सक्रिय वॉलंटियर्स जुड़े हुए हैं और उसकी टीम अब तक सैकड़ों लोगों तक सहायता सुनिश्चित कर चुकी है।

"अप्रैल के आखिर में अफरातफरी मची ही हुई थी। यह वह वक्त था जब हर दूसरे-तीसरे घर में कोविड का केस था। कि इसी दौरान मेरे घर में ही एक केस हुआ। मैं तब दिल्ली में अपनी नानी के घर पर थी। रात के ढाई बजे तक हम लोग एक अस्पताल से दूसरे अस्पताल के बारे में पता करते रहे लेकिन कहीं भी एक अदद ऑक्सीजन बेड मुहैया नहीं था। तब मैंने अपना फोन उठाया 50 से ज्यादा अस्पतालों को लगातार कॉल किया, तब जाकर एक जगह कॉल लगी और बेड मिल गया जिससे बड़ी राहत मिली। तभी मैंने सोचा कि इस तरह कितने लोग मुसीबत में होंगे और उन्हें पता ही नहीं होगा कि कहां क्या उपलब्ध है। हमने फटाफट व्हाट्स ऐप पर 'कोविड हेल्पिंग हैंड्स' नाम से ग्रुप बनाया, कुछ दोस्तों-सहपाठियों, परिजनों और टीचर्स को जोड़ा और काम में जुट गये।"

इस ग्रुप में 20-25 एक्टिव वॉलंटियर्स हैं और पूरे देश से करीब 1200 लोग सदस्य हैं। वॉलंटियर्स सबसे पहले कॉल वेरिफाई करते हैं क्योंकि अक्सर उन्हें दूसरों से मदद मिल चुकी होती है। इसके बाद उन्हें बिना किसी बिचौलिये के सीधे मदद देने वाले से जोड़ दिया जाता है। इस तरह यह ग्रुप करीब 1500 लोगों तक मदद पहुंचा है।

रिदम कटारिया 'आरएमएलएनयू कोविड रिलीफ' ग्रुप लखनऊ

जयपुर के रहने वाले रिदम लखनऊ के राम मनोहर लोहिया राष्ट्रीय विधि विश्वविद्यालय के छात्र हैं और सोशल मीडिया के जरिये 'आरएमएलएनयू कोविड रिलीफ' नाम के ग्रुप के संयोजक हैं। महज 21 साल के इस नौजवान की टीम में 400 से ज्यादा वॉलंटियर्स हैं जो अब तक देश के 3000 लोगों की मदद महामारी के दौरान कर चुके हैं। रिदम के मुताबिक "ज्यादातर समस्याएं ऑक्सीजन सिलेंडर की उपलब्धता और आपूर्ति की थीं जिसे तमाम फर्जी सूचनाओं और दलालों से बचाते हुए पूरा किया गया। ऐन वक्त पर कई लोगों के फोन न लगना या न उठना भी एक बड़ी समस्या जिससे निपटने के लिए टीम को अतिरिक्त मेहनत करनी पड़ी। देखते ही देखते एक अखिल भारतीय वर्चुअल मंच स्थापित हो गया जिसमें कई कोरोना पॉजिटिव लोग भी खुल कर मदद करते रहे।" विश्वविद्यालय के लीगल एड सेल की ओर से शुरू की गई मुहिम से अब कई राज्यों के लोग जुड़ चुके हैं।

गर्वित विज, ऑल इंडिया कोविड हेल्पलाइन, गाजियाबाद

दिल्ली के इस छात्र ने गाजियाबाद के पावन चिंतन धारा आश्रम के यूथ अवेकनिंग मिशन के नेशनल कोऑर्डिनेटर होते हुए कोरोना पीड़ितों की मदद के काम की अगुवाई अपने सहयोगी रोहित केसरी के साथ मिलकर संभाली।

इस अभियान से करीब 200 डॉक्टर्स और 250 कार्यकर्ता जुड़े हुए हैं। ग्रुप ने हेल्पलाइन नंबर के साथ ही फेसबुक इंस्टाग्राम और ट्विटर के जरिये का भी सहारा लिया और इस तरह रिकॉर्ड 8000 से ज्यादा लोगों तक कोरोना की दूसरी लहर में राहत पहुंचाई। गर्वित के मुताबिक “इस ग्रुप ने चिकित्सकीय सलाह संक्रमित परिवारों को पौष्टिक भोजन ऑक्सीजन दवाइयां और अस्पताल में बेड जैसी आवश्यक मदद मुफ्त उपलब्ध करवाई।”

अंश गर्ग, कोविड सहायता केंद्र, सहारनपुर

कोरोना की आततायी दूसरी लहर के दौरान अपने आसपास जबरदस्त संकट देख सहारनपुर का यह युवा छात्र अपने दो साथियों के साथ कोरोना पीड़ितों की मदद के काम में कूद पड़ा। अवनी सिंह और रिषव गुप्ता नाम के दोस्तों के साथ मिलकर अंश ने व्हाट्सएप ग्रुप बनाया और देखते ही देखते ग्रुप से 300 से ज्यादा लोग मदद के लिए जुड़ गये। शुरुआत में इसका दायरा सहारनपुर और मेरठ था लेकिन धीरे-धीरे विस्तार होता गया। अंश बताते हैं कि “जहां जरूरत वहां हम” की टैग लाइन से 4 मई को शुरू किये गये इस अभियान के तहत सबसे ज्यादा ऑक्सीजन सिलेंडर्स से जुड़े मामले आये और हम ऐसे करीब 500 लोगों तक राहत पहुंचाने में कामयाब रहे। इस दौरान एक लगातार बढ़ रहे ऑनलाइन नेटवर्क को संभालना साथ ही साथ दूसरे युवाओं को समाज की सेवा के लिए प्रेरित करना चुनौतीपूर्ण कार्य रहा।”

रुद्रांशी शुक्ला, मल्टीपल कोविड हेल्प ग्रुप्स वॉलंटियर, नोएडा

नोएडा की रुद्रांशी यूं तो अंग्रेजी साहित्य में मास्टर्स के बाद एक डिजिटल मार्केटिंग में सक्रिय हैं लेकिन कोरोना की दूसरी लहर के दौरान अपना सारा काम छोड़ कर उन डिजिटल ग्रुप्स से जा जुड़ी, जो दिन-रात पीड़ितों की मदद में लगे थे। वह देश के करीब 10-12 ग्रुप्स के माध्यम से मदद की किसी अपील को वेरिफाई करने, ऑक्सीजन सिलेंडर और प्लाज्मा की उपलब्धता और खाली बेड वाले अस्पतालों के ब्योरे जुटाने में लगी रहीं। ईश्वर में गहरी आस्था रखने वाली रुद्रांशी की तत्परता और कर्मठता से हर ग्रुप के लोग प्रभावित रहे। इस दौरान वो इंस्टाग्राम पर अपने व्यक्तिगत प्रोफाइल के जरिये भी सक्रिय रही। रुद्रांशी के मुताबिक “मुझे लोगों की सेवा करने से आत्मिक सुख मिला और अब आगे भी ऐसे काम जारी रखूंगी। देश और देश के लोगों से बढ़कर कुछ भी नहीं। ये सब हमारे अपने ही लोग हैं और किसी को मुसीबत में छोड़कर बैठ जाना मानवता नहीं। कल को हमारा या आपका भी नंबर आ सकता है और तब समाज आपसे मुंह फेर ले तो कैसा लगेगा?”

गौरव पंकज, कोविड सर्विस, जयपुर

जयपुर के 20 साल के छात्र गौरव पंकज ने अप्रैल के आखिर में 5 दोस्तों के साथ ‘कोविड सर्विस’ नाम से व्हाट्सएप पर अभियान शुरू किया और देखते ही देखते सैकड़ों लोग आ जुड़े। उनके मुताबिक “दूसरी लहर का कहर कम करने में अगर हमारी टीम का जरा भी योगदान रहा, तो इसे हम ईश्वर का आशीर्वाद मानेंगे। क्योंकि ये वो वक्त था जब इंसान दूसरे इंसान और इंसानियत से दूर भागकर खुद की जान बचाने की जद्दोजहद में लगा था। लेकिन कुछ लोग ऐसे थे जो अपने साथ-साथ दूसरों का भी ख्याल कर रहे थे और ऐसे काफी लोग हमसे जुड़े और हमने सामूहिक प्रयास से कई लोगों की मदद की।”

“जयपुर के ही 23 साल के ऋतिक के मुताबिक “बिना किसी स्वार्थ के किसी पीड़ित की मदद करने का सुकून कुछ और ही है। जिस वक्त लोग अस्पताल बेड, ऑक्सीजन और खून के लिए भटक रहे थे, ऐसे वक्त में कुछ दोस्तों के साथ मिलकर हमने ‘कोविड वॉरियर्स’ नाम से व्हाट्सएप पर ग्रुप बनाया और ढाई-तीन सौ लोगों की मदद की।”

पीयूष जोशी, फाइट अंगेस्ट कोविड-19, हल्द्वानी

यूं तो पीयूष दिल्ली में रहकर सिविल सर्विसेज की तैयारी कर रहे हैं लेकिन मूल रूप से उत्तराखंड के हल्द्वानी के रहने वाले हैं। कोरोना की शुरुआत में ही इन्होंने दिल्ली में कार्यरत एसडीएम डॉ.नितिन शाखा की मदद से डिजिटल प्लेटफॉर्म बनाकर कामर कस ली थी। धीरे-धीरे कारवां बढ़ता गया और लोग जुड़ते गए। कई सिविल सेवा प्रतियोगी छात्र, अधिकारी, एनजीओ वर्कर्स और डॉक्टर्स आज ग्रुप से सीधे जुड़े हुए हैं और वॉलंटियर्स की संख्या हजारों में पहुंच गई। टेलीग्राम, फेसबुक, इंस्टाग्राम और व्हाट्सएप पर संचालित ग्रुप के कुल सदस्यों, वॉलंटियर्स और फॉलोअर्स की तादाद पचास हजार तक है। इतना ही विशाल है कोरोना पीड़ितों की मदद का आंकड़ा। उत्तराखंड से लेकर दिल्ली तक और कश्मीर से बंगाल तक ग्रुप ने बिना रुके मदद पहुंचाई। पीयूष कहते हैं कि “संभवतः यह अकेला ग्रुप है जिसने प्रशासन के साथ कंधे से कंधा मिलाकर काम किया। हालांकि कई बार कुछ सरकारी कर्मचारियों की कार्यशैली से निराशा भी हुई। कोरोना पीड़ितों को चिकित्सीय सुविधाएं दिलाने में मदद के अतिरिक्त हमने लोगों को सुरक्षित घर पहुंचाने, राशन किट और फूड पैकेट पहुंचाने में काफी मदद की और अब तीसरी लहर के अंदेश के लिए हम तीन हजार प्रशिक्षित ‘स्वास्थ्य दूत’ तैनात करने की योजना पर काम कर रहे हैं।”

“यह तो महज बानगी है। देश के सैकड़ों नौजवान कोरोना की आपदा के दौरान वर्जुअल वॉरियर की तरह उभरे और डिजिटल टेक्नॉलॉजी की मदद से पीड़ितों तक राहत पहुंचाई। यह उन युवाओं के लिए भी एक सकारात्मक संदेश है जो बेवजह मोबाइल-लैपटॉप से चिपके रहते हैं और इसे सिर्फ मनोरंजन और टाइम-पास के तौर पर देखते हैं। डिजिटल टेक्नॉलॉजी बदलाव का एक औजार भी है, बशर्ते उसे उस रूप में प्रयोग किया जाए।”

How Kerala Is Nurturing Young Volunteers For Crisis Situations

Shahina KK

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Social Volunteer Force was set up after the devastating floods of 2018. Today it is a 3.78 lakh strong team of men and women, which has reached out to the needy during the pandemic.

Rekha is a volunteer at a Domiciliary Care Centre for asymptomatic COVID patients at Punnappra in Alappuzha in Kerala. One day, she was serving food for the inmates, when one of them complained of breathlessness.

The volunteers at the centre called for an ambulance, but they were told it would take about 10 minutes to reach. Rekha and her colleague Aswin decided not to wait. They quickly put up the PPE kits and drove the patient to a nearby hospital on a scooter.

Doctors realized the patient's condition was deteriorating and quickly put him on oxygen. In half an hour, his condition improved and he stabilized.

While this might have been a routine job for Rekha and Aswin, they were not prepared for the media scrutiny that followed. A video footage of the two volunteers hurriedly carrying the patient on a scooter went viral. Some television channels reported that a COVID patient was taken from the First Line Treatment Centre to another facility by "sanitation workers" because of insufficient medical care. It was also reported that the patient was shifted on a two-wheeler because no ambulance was available, which was interpreted as a serious lapse on part of the government.

The details, however, started trickling in later and it became evident that the two volunteers were not from a First Line Treatment Centre, but a Domiciliary Care Centre. Media persons too corrected information about ambulance and sanitation workers.

Volunteer power

Rekha, 22, is a member of the Democratic Youth Federation of India, the youth wing of Kerala's ruling CPI(M). She is one of the lakhs of volunteers who are helping COVID patients with food, medicines, other necessities and logistics.

It all began in 2018 when heavy rain-triggered floods inundated several parts of Kerala, displacing thousands from their homes. Many people came forward to help and formed small groups and worked out rescue operations.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, with a mission to tap this overwhelming response from the people during floods, decided to formalise it and launched the 'Social Volunteer Force'.

Soon, lakhs joined the force. As on May 17, 3,78,077 volunteers have registered with the Social Volunteer Force, of which, 88,857 are women. All the women are in the age group of 18 to 40. Once they join, they are directed to the ward level committees or respective police stations to carry out a range of duties like providing food and medicine to COVID patients, taking care of the elderly, assisting the police in implementing lockdown rules and cremating bodies among others.

Sreekant, an engineer who assists the police now, recalls his days during the 2018 floods. "I was working day and night while rescuing people. After the rains stopped and water level dropped, we provided food to people in relief camps for weeks," he said.

As a police volunteer, Sreekant, besides 20 others, helps cops monitor COVID positive people in quarantine in Kottayam. "We visit those who tested positive and are living in home isolation. They are given medicines or food and connected with the local health team. I cover 10-15 houses a day. We also assist the police in implementing lockdown rules," he says.

There are 24,816 police volunteers across 481 police stations in Kerala. A total of 3,456 volunteers were engaged with the fire and rescue service after giving them special training.

Rekha, who took a critical COVID patient on her two-wheeler, had also received special training from the Fire and Rescue Service. "While rescuing people during floods, I realised that we need special skills and training for such operations. Hence, I decided to join the 'Fire and Rescue Civil Design', a special wing to train civilians. We were given training to handle accidents such as building collapse and fire besides natural disasters such as floods and cyclones," says Rekha.

There is a Rapid Response Team in every municipal body with 20-25 volunteers each. While they usually respond to emergencies, their activities have increased during the pandemic, especially at places where lockdown is in force or where there is a need for urgent distribution of food, groceries or medicines. The volunteers also check on COVID patients at homes and Domiciliary Care Centres.

Vishnu Sankar of Padiyur in Thrissur district along with a team of volunteers distributes food to truck drivers and other passengers on the highway. "We distribute around 50 food packets a day. We had done this last year too when lockdown was announced," says Vishnu, who is also an activist of All India Youth Federation, the youth wing of CPI.

The food packets distributed are often sponsored at the local level and prepared at volunteers' homes.

The social volunteer force is a concept that Kerala has borrowed from countries like Singapore and Thailand, says Amith, education and communication expert with the government of Kerala.

Life and volunteering

Volunteers like Sreekant balance livelihood and volunteering. "I run a construction firm of my own. During the first and second waves, I mostly spent my time volunteering," says Sreekant.

Mir Moheemad Ali, state coordinator of Social Volunteer Force, said the volunteers are obviously not paid.

These volunteers are also members of some political, cultural and professional organisations. Sreekant is the Kottayam district president of 'Registered Engineers Association', a professional organisation of engineers and supervisors.

Political organisations like DYFI, AIYF, local arts and sports clubs, libraries and Kudumbasree units provide a number of volunteers who are on the field attending to the needs of COVID patients, elderly and bed-ridden people and even for performing cremation of those who died of COVID when the family members and relatives of the deceased are scared to do it.

Recently, pictures of Manjusha, a native of Vellayani in Thiruvananthapuram and a bank employee, were seen on Facebook helping in the cremation of a person who died of COVID.

"This was an old woman living alone. She was admitted to the Medical College and Hospital where she died. I was informed about it by someone from the hospital and so I rushed in," says Manjusha, state convenor of Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI).

Manjusha remembers the Ockhi Cyclone of 2017 as quite devastating. “I witnessed lives being uprooted by the cyclone. Our organisation, BEFI, was into relief activities in the coastal areas. We distributed rice and other food material to people living in relief camps,” she said. Volunteers like Manjusha and Rekha are often asked if they are not reluctant to cremate strangers. Both the women volunteers answered what meant: “Everyone is the same at the face of death. We have no option but to do it when relatives and even family members are scared to touch the body of a person who died of a pandemic.”

Harish Kumar, a businessman at Vazhoor in Kottayam and a volunteer with Fire and Rescue Service, has been volunteering even before the flood. “I am a member of Blood Donors Kerala (an organisation that has members across the state and even in Gulf countries). My organisation played a pivotal role in flood relief and rescue operations,” he says. Harish recollects the days and nights he spent under torrential rain in country boats with fishermen rescuing people held up in water-logged houses. Harish now works with the Police and Fire Service on call, at times attending to the requirement of a COVID patient in First Line Treatment Centres, sometimes to carry someone critical to the hospital, and at times cremating the dead.

What fascinates Harish about volunteering is that there is no class difference among them. “People from all walks of life are doing the same work—daily wage workers, businessmen, teachers, civil servants and all. We have learned great lessons from the flood. We can deal with any calamity if there is a collective will,” says Harish.

Pandemic & Burden Of Caregiving: How Women Fought All Odds To Continue Taking Care Of The Sick

Aritra Bhattacharya

3 August 2021, indiatimes.com

On May 4 this year, Mumbai resident Brinelle D'Souza's family of five – comprising herself, her father, daughter, son and housekeeper tested positive for COVID-19. Although none of them showed any symptoms in the initial days, D'Souza was on the edge for she didn't know when things might take a turn for the worse, more so because her daughter's oxygen saturation was falling.

"As my family's principal caregiver, I was doing a number of things, including consultations with doctors, organising diagnostic tests, annotating reports and medical advice, procuring medicines and groceries, besides helping with cooking, cleaning and other household chores as my housekeeper was also infected," said D'Souza, Chairperson of the Centre for Health and Mental Health, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and Co-convenor of public health advocacy group Jan Swasthya Abhiyan.

"But the most stressful part was not knowing what turn things would take – What if any of us fell severely sick? Would we find oxygen or hospital beds? Would we be able to afford treatment that cost lakhs? We had good medical advice but COVID is unpredictable and medical knowledge still evolving. I suddenly felt responsible for four other lives, and couldn't keep away from thinking, "what if I make the wrong decision?" she recalled.

D'Souza's fears and doubts intensified further when her father's oxygen levels started falling rapidly a few days later, and she had to decide where to admit him. "Private hospitals were often into irrational care, including excessive use of drugs like remdesivir, tocilizumab and steroids so we wanted to avoid them. I had a friend who was a senior physician at Shatabdi Hospital, a government COVID facility that was close by. He assured me that my father would be managed well.

Her father, Noel D'Souza (79) was admitted in Shatabdi Hospital on May 10. Although stable for the first two days, his condition deteriorated on the night of the May 12. He was put on a ventilator and passed away in a couple of hours. D'Souza herself started showing symptoms within a day of being diagnosed with COVID infection. Her oxygen saturation dropped, and she had severe diarrhea and weakness. But she did not seek hospital admission because there was no one else to follow up on her father's treatment and take care of family members.

"The day my father died, I was sitting on the floor outside the ICU with my daughter, both of us very sick. We were not allowed to enter the ICU. The doctors said that my father had developed early stages of COVID pneumonia and we would be vulnerable to it given our reduced immunity levels. So, I could not even see my father one last time," she said, drawing attention to the unresolved grief and fears of death and dying brought on by the pandemic. "I got admitted later that day. My oxygen level had fallen to 70. While leaving for the hospital, I made it a point to tell my children that I loved them immensely and always had their best interests in mind as I wasn't sure that I would come back," she added. She was discharged from the hospital on May 23, and had a very slow recovery. In addition, she suffered from survivor's guilt. "Even now, I keep thinking, should I have admitted him to a private hospital? Would he have survived, then? The lack of physical support, of relatives visiting and collectively grieving, has only worsened these fears and anxieties," she said.

Pandemics, Caregiving And Women

D'Souza's case is emblematic of how the pandemic has complicated the task of caregivers in significant ways. It has added to their work burden, drained their financial reserves, heightened their fears and doubts, compromised their access to support – especially

physical support from relatives and health care providers, and forced them to confront thoughts of death and dying rather closely.

An overwhelming majority of those encountering such circumstances are women, largely because they are consigned to care-giving roles in most religious discourses and social institutions, including the family, where they spend most of their time. Their tasks as caregivers typically include a host of chores like cooking, cleaning, ensuring the household has enough stock of groceries and kitchen requirements, and monitoring and looking after children and sick family members. Whereas even in the healthcare industry globally, women comprise 70 percent of the paid care-giving workforce in roles like nursing.

Given these circumstances, UN Women issued a policy brief in the early stage of the pandemic warning of its impact on gender equity. "Evidence from previous epidemics illustrates that women and girls take on the bulk of unpaid or poorly paid care work in families and communities when formal health systems are unable to cope with the rising tide of infections," it stated, and warned, "Rising demand for care in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and response will likely deepen already existing inequalities in the gender division of labour, placing a disproportionate burden on women and girls."

Extra Pressure, Urgent Steps

Emphasising on the "extra pressure on carers" owing to the pandemic and related lockdowns and restrictions, UN Women recommended member states to take a number of urgent measures.

These included recognising care workers, both paid and unpaid, as essential workers so they were exempted from restrictions; expanding their social protection, including through cash transfers and reduced work hours; providing them with a minimum level of childcare services; and prioritizing access to food and basic services.

Healthcare workers and activists associated with public health advocacy groups like Jan Swastha Abhiyan said none of these recommendations were acted upon in India, compounding the challenges confronting caregivers amidst the pandemic, and leaving them without any institutional support.

Challenges, Fears And Lack Of State Support

Testimonies of caregivers from West Bengal and Maharashtra exposed the lack of state support, and provided insights into the challenges and pressures they encountered during the pandemic.

Like most others, Kolkata resident Chandana De spoke of the immense fear and anxiety she underwent in April this year when her largely bedridden 90-year-old mother suffered a head injury from a fall in the bathroom. "It happened late at night, around 2-3 AM. I applied ice and dressed her injury after the bleeding stopped. The next day, I tried my best to get a doctor to see her, but most were unwilling to visit home, and the one who agreed did not come owing to some misunderstanding. Suddenly, towards the evening, she started becoming breathless," recalled De, who lives alone with her mother on the outskirts of south Kolkata.

Neighbours stepped in promptly to help her, and measured her mother's saturation, blood pressure and sugar level, which was found to be low; she also developed speech impairment. Concerned if the head injury was severe, De and others took her to Peerless Hospital, where doctors examined her and said she had an internal hemorrhage, and required immediate hospitalization with ventilation support.

"But they were unable to show us any reports stating there was a hemorrhage. Besides, even a 3-4 day stay in the ICU would cost at least Rs 3-4 lakh, which I did not have. So we took her back home. And then for five days, all I did was talk to my mother, I was sacred she would die, and did not sleep a wink, but neighbours visited often, and provided us food and

strength,” said De, whose mother recovered significantly in ensuing weeks. Despite being the sole caregiver for her ailing mother, De was not recognised as an essential worker. She received no exemption or social protection from the state to contend with her mother’s illness, neither provision of food and basic services, like doctor visits at home.

The circumstances facing Sikha Bhattacharjee, a retired government employee whose husband was hospitalized five times due to COVID and post COVID complications between May and July this year, were similarly distressing. Based in Asansol in West Bengal, she struggled to find doctors who would physically examine her husband Tapan Bhattacharjee through his sickness as most doctors saw patients via video calls or behind a screen. She also faced immense difficulty in accessing oxygen and ambulance services and hospitals providing quality, affordable treatment and care each time her husband’s sickness worsened.

“Most numbers of government approved service providers for ambulance and oxygen were either switched off or out of network area. And many who answered refused after getting to know the patient was positive,” she said. Equally critical of COVID volunteer groups, including those associated with NGOs, civil society groups and political parties, she noted, “Most groups make huge claims about helping COVID affected people on social media, but their work is largely limited to delivering food, grocery and medicines to homes of patients. They don’t even enter the homes of COVID positive patients, leaving deliverables at the doorstep! And when it comes to support in emergencies, with oxygen cylinders and ambulance, all they do is forward the numbers of service providers who either don’t answer phones, or promise to call back, or ask for a huge amount of documentation, like details of the patient, copies of identity cards, and photographs showing oxygen saturation – all while someone is dealing with an emergency!”

Like in the case of D’Souza and De, neighbours and family members helped Bhattacharjee tide over emergencies. Even then, she struggled to comprehend how her husband was doing when hospitalised, especially since chances of visiting him or interacting with doctors was absent or severely curtailed. These uncertainties, and the additional work burden, severely affected her physical and mental well-being. “Even now, on days when my husband does not keep well, we are gripped by fear and anxiety – Will he survive? Will he have to be hospitalized again? Will doctors and nurses take good care of him, and inform us about his progress. My blood pressure has dipped a lot lately while palpitations have increased – and often, I feel like I’ll go mad,” she said.

Impact On Mental Health

Mental health professionals said the toll of the pandemic on caregivers was immense, and included anxiety and depression most commonly, but also Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and survivor’s guilt, especially if they lost patients or relatives.

Mumbai-based psychiatrist and mindfulness teacher Rajendra Barve drew attention to the compassion burnout among professional healthcare workers, including doctors and nurses, as a result of uncertainties surrounding the pandemic. “Even in critical illnesses like cancer, there is a well-established protocol and the diagnosis and path of treatment are very clear. But in the case of COVID, there is hardly any protocol or prognosis, and even doctors are not very sure about what might happen to patients in future. Plus, there are long duty hours, increased demand for care from patients, high risk of infection and the labour of working with PPE kits, which is very cumbersome and tiring. I’ve seen a lot of cases of burnout among resident doctors and nurses in recent months, but the biggest casualty for caregivers is compassion burnout – where they are too tired and appear indifferent, less warm and understanding towards patients and their queries,” said Barve.

Brinelle D’Souza, Chairperson of the Centre for Health and Mental Health, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai whose father passed away recently, drew attention to the lack of spaces for collective grieving for caregivers and families contending with death. “Because of the pandemic, you can’t go for funerals. There is no one to condole or wish

you, stand by your side and comfort you physically as in regular times. There's no scope for grief and grieving," she said, and stressed that the distress facing poor women was more severe, especially in cases where they lost their husband. "The loss of the breadwinner creates deep financial distress, and I know several women who were often forced to make desperate decisions like selling their jewelry or taking micro-credit on high interest to pay for the treatment of family members, or put food on the table, pay house rent," she said, drawing on her work as a public health activist.

"What we need urgently are safe spaces both online and offline where people can talk and grieve collectively. We also need strong social security measures and comprehensive relief packages from the state, especially for the poor and marginalized. These will help reduce to some extent the distress that many households and caregivers are experiencing. We also need community mental health programs. For this, we must train community members as mental health volunteers, whom people can reach out to in times of distress," said D'Souza, who was involved with Jan Swastha Abhiyan's efforts to train community mental health volunteers in Mumbai during the second wave of the pandemic.

Thousands Of Tribal Women Chart Their Own Future After Vocational Training

Madhav Sharma

17 April 2021, gaonconnection.com

About 4,300 women in Dungarpur and Banswara districts of Rajasthan have gone on to set up their own enterprises after undergoing skill development training offered by the Dungarpur Municipal Council and local non-profits.

Dungarpur and Banswara, Rajasthan

Dungarpur and Banswara, two predominantly tribal districts of Rajasthan, are infamous for poverty, malnutrition and high disease burden. While most young men migrate for work, the women are left behind to look after the children and elderly. These rural women lack employment opportunities and face economic hardships.

But joint initiatives by the local municipality and non-profit groups are helping tribal women in these districts script their success stories.

Women are being trained in sewing and embroidery and taught to make sanitary napkins, masks, papads, diyas and candles.

Today, about 4,300 tribal women – 800 in Dungarpur and 3,500 in Banswara – are reaping the benefits of such training imparted to them in the last two years.

“There are no big companies or permanent means of employment available locally. The men go to Gujarat looking for jobs, but what will the women and girls do?” KK Gupta, former chairperson of Dungarpur Municipal Council, asked Gaon Connection.

Towards self-reliance

It was in 2018 that the Dungarpur Municipal Council began training centres for women in six wards with 10 sewing machines each. Eventually, these were merged into four centres, where about 200 women undergo training. During training, raw material is provided to them free of cost.

In two years, about 800 women have left the centres after receiving training that gives them a shot at earning. The centres operate in Shastri Colony, Sonia Chowk, Ghati and New Colony. One of them has been handed over to a non-profit institution called Unnati, and the other three are run by the Dungarpur Municipal Council.

Hansa Shrimal, a trainer at the centre run by Unnati, told Gaon Connection that, earlier, her centre used to operate with a batch of 50 women. At present, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing norms, it is down to 25, “Most of those who attend the training are in dire need and shoulder the responsibility of their families,” Shrimal said.

Among the current trainees at Shrimal’s centre, 12 are divorced or widowed and the rest are survivors of domestic violence and other hardships. “During the pandemic, a million masks have been made at these centres. We are providing free training to women in need,” Shrimal said.

Many of the trainees now work independently. “They take raw material from us and work from home,” said Shrimal, adding that tribal women who used to migrate to Gujarat with their families in search of a livelihood have also opted for this training.

Seema from Phoonali village, 20 kilometres from Dungarpur city, earns Rs 5,000 a month, after being trained at Unnati. It allows her to look after her two children well. She used to suffer domestic abuse, and her husband, who used to earn Rs 6,000 a month, lost his job during the pandemic.

Like Dungarpur, tribal women of Kushalgarh tehsil in Banswara district are becoming self-reliant with their craftsmanship. Usually, the highest migration of tribals from Kushalgarh tehsil is to the neighbouring state of Gujarat. Nidhi Jain, a social worker, began Pratidhwani, a skill development centre, in the region in December 2016 with 55 women from the tribal community.

Today, about 3,500 women are associated with the Sakhi programme of Pratidhwani and learn to do a variety of things along with sewing and embroidery.

Soumya Kharhiya, who is associated with the Sakhi programme, hails from the tribal community at Potliya village in Kushalgarh. Kharhiya said, "In 2018, I joined Pratidhwani and learned stitching. Today, I am self-reliant and work at the institute itself. I made about thirty thousand masks during the lockdown."

Kharhiya added, "Before 2018, I used to earn less than three thousand rupees as a domestic helper. Now, I earn up to ten thousand rupees from sewing. I am the sole earner at home and still am able to run my household comfortably," she said.

"The condition of women in tribal districts is worse than that of men on every scale. In such a situation, women will gain social equality with men only if they are financially capable. Seeing our work, the TAD [Tribal Area Development Commissioner] has given us the responsibility of linking women in other areas too with the project," Jain said.

Jain pointed out that along with skill development, the confidence of women has also received a boost. Some have even gone on to set up self help groups and make pickles and papad. Others pick up employment in the field of sewing.

"Until some years ago, they had not even stepped out of their houses. Today, they are travelling all by themselves to big cities like Delhi to sell their goods," she added.

Education By Girls, For Girls — How Ayodhya Group Is Helping Students Stay In School, College

Jyoti Yadav

27 July 2021, theprint.in



Ayodhya: When the Covid lockdown first kicked in last year and talk of classes shifting online began, Rani Sonkar, a 17-year-old Ayodhya student who had just taken admission in a college, was thrilled. Eager not to miss out on lessons when her college reopened digitally, she picked up work as a part-time domestic worker and bought herself an Android phone worth Rs 6,000.

Then she waited, and waited, and waited. A year and a half later, the wait continues for Rani, who should have ideally started the second year of her BA course this session.

Her college — Kanta Prasad Sundar Lal Saket Mahavidyalay, a government institute — never held any online classes at all. And in the meantime, Rani, who lives in a 200-square-foot room with her mother and elder sister at Ayodhya's Dilkusha locality, saw her life take a different direction from what she hoped.

"I started waking up at 7 am. I would cook food, wash dishes, do the laundry, and then accompany my mother to work. At the posh houses, I would see mothers helping their kids with online classes. I felt left out and vulnerable," she told ThePrint. "I feared I would forget all my learning skills by the time the college reopens."

But something happened a month ago that assuaged Rani's fears to some extent. She received a call from Jagriti, an MA second-year student at the same college, who asked her to join a local study centre she was helping start.

The study centre, titled 'Apna Taleem Ghar' or 'our home of education', is one of three set up in as many Ayodhya localities by the Awadh Peoples Forum (APF), a youth collective looking to prevent girl students from dropping out of the education system in the absence of regular classes or digital access.

It is a largely informal set-up, where volunteers associated with the NGO — drawn from the same areas as the students — help girls keep up with their curriculum. The centres also offer students alternative literature — books about Ambedkar, classics, texts on menstrual hygiene and social issues — that has been donated to the APF.

The idea is to keep them in the loop of education. To convince families to allow their daughters to participate, the centres offer tailoring training as an incentive.

It is an initiative the girls at the centres express much gratitude for. "Mobiles are owned by either fathers or brothers. So, even if our government schools had started online classes, we would have never been able to join because the agency of mobile phones lies with the men," said Khooshboo Nishad, 19, who studies at the centre in Murawan Tola.

Khooshboo cleared her Class 12 last year but has yet to take admission in college. "This study centre gives us solidarity," she told ThePrint. "We can at least talk about books here. The pandemic has totally changed the fortunes of underprivileged girls like us. Five of my friends got married," she said. "Many are now helping families earn bread and butter."

Learning on rooftop

Dilkusha, where Rani resides, is largely inhabited by vegetable sellers, domestic workers, e-rickshaw drivers and garbage collectors.

"We are daily-wage labourers. After the government announced the lockdown, we thought we would die of hunger," said Rani's mother Reeta Devi, 42. "The employment is still irregular due to the weekend lockdown. Some days, we have food on our plate, and some days, we struggle hard."

She said she is due to pay Rani's second-year admission fees — Rs 6,000. "This is when she did not have any classes this year," she added.

The study centre opened in the locality caters to 14 other girls besides Rani. The number is higher at Murawan Tola, a Dalit basti of hundreds of half-built houses and congested lanes, which is located 6 kilometres away from Dilkusha. Since no house here was deemed big enough to accommodate a centre where dozens of girls would come to study, local resident Anjali Nishad, 21, offered her rooftop for the purpose.

On 24 July, when ThePrint visited the site, around 20 girls had come together under the open sky to study at the makeshift centre. Their ages ranged from 12 to 22 years.

As of now, the three centres — the third is at Buchniganj, a colony primarily inhabited by daily wagers — run by the Awadh Peoples Forum cater to around 100 girls.

For the girl child

Talking about the origin of the initiative, Afaq, one of the members of the social group, said they wanted to ensure girl students stayed in the education system.

"For the last four years, we were working for the cause of girl child education and set up schools in Bahujan bastis. As the pandemic hit the country, the schools were shut," he said. "Since the girls belonged to families of daily-wage labourers who lost their employment in the second Covid wave, there was a high chance that they could be withdrawn from school and married off."

"That is when we started Apna Taleem Ghar, a study centre for the girls and by the girls," he said. "We selected a few team leaders who then listed the vulnerable girls and convinced them to join the community class."

When Awadh Peoples Forum started the study centres, the biggest challenge was to convince the families, said Ashish Kumar, another member of the group. "To convince the families, we offered a tailoring course so that the girls could come to the centres. So, we have one hour to study and one to learn sewing."

Jagriti, a team leader with the initiative, noted that such an incentive is required because their families "are not that educated".

"We don't have an idea to look up to. No girl has ever achieved anything. So, education is not the top priority," she added. "I had listed 32 vulnerable girls who were either on the verge of dropping out or who did not have any access to mobiles. But, so far, 15 have joined."

While the study centres are helping girls keep up with learning, the fact that many students haven't been able to access online lessons at their schools/colleges for months on end paints a grim picture for education goals.

Reached for comment about the potential implications, Santosh Pandey, the Zilla Basic Shiksha Adhikari, said the administration is at work to address these concerns.

"We are appointing prerna sathi (inspiration companions) in the district, where educated youth will reach out to these students. In the coming month, each and every student will be connected to online classes. We have directed teachers to identify the vulnerable students," he added.

'Don't Want To Live Like A Victim' — How A Women's Adalat In UP Is Empowering Survivors Of Abuse

Jyoti Yadav

16 August 2021, theprint.in

Banda: "Chup Chup rahna, ghut ghut jeena, ye baat humein manzoor nahin (Don't talk about your sufferings, bury your feelings, we don't accept a life of suffocation like this)."

This is the motto of Chingari Adalat — a women's self-help group operating in UP's Banda district that has been empowering women to break the shackles of silence imposed by generations of patriarchal society and talk about issues like domestic violence and sexual abuse faced by them.

Started in 2019 by the Vidya Dhami Society — an NGO registered in 2001 by a local activist who goes by the name of Raja Bhaiyya — Chingari Adalat works as an informal 'women's courtroom', dispensing legal advice, ensuring victims have access to legal recourse and, if needed, providing them with financial help in their legal battle.

At the centre of operations are three women — 35-year-old Mubina, 54-year-old Meenakshi Gupta and 50-year-old Pushplata. While Meenakshi and Pushplata have been social activists working for marginalised women in the Bundelkhand region for the past three decades, Mubina, is the one who connects with the victims, speaking their language and explaining to them the legal parlance often used by Meenakshi and Pushpalata that many of them don't understand.

Meetings are held every Sunday, where lawyers are also present to advise the women. The Chingari Adalat workers first hear out the women and counsel them. If legal recourse has already been sought, the documents are studied and further action advised. Others are told how to approach the police and legal set-up. The Adalat's workers follow up with the police and lawyers on the cases as and when needed.

"Due to poverty, many women are not able to hire good lawyers. We provide financial help also. This way, we ensure that women have a sense of security and solidarity. When they move ahead with their legal battles to get justice, Chingari Adalat tries to become the force behind them," Raja Bhaiya said.

According to the data shared by Chingari Adalat, it received 346 complaints of domestic violence in 2019. The number rose to 477 in 2020 and, in 2021 they have already received 311 complaints till the end of July.

However, according to Raja Bhaiyya, the number of complaints received in the past year-and-a-half should not be considered to be representative of the extent of the problem, since "fewer women could access the justice system meant for them during Covid times".

"The true picture of domestic violence during this period might not be reflected in the total number of registered FIRs registered pan-India," he added. His views are shared by police officers across districts in UP, many of whom told ThePrint on condition of anonymity that not every victim of domestic abuse reaches out to the police. This has been even more so during the pandemic.

"Due to public transport being unavailable for many months during the lockdown, vulnerable women could not leave their homes and fewer cases of abuse reached the authorities," said a police superintendent in UP. "Also, the police were overburdened with Covid management during this time."

'He married another woman' Meenakshi, Pushplata and Mubina were seated under a guava tree in the premises of the Vidya Dhama Society in Banda's Attara town, when ThePrint caught up with them on a Sunday. In front of them sat 34-year-old Naseem Bano, shaking with fear, anxiety and nervousness. Years of alleged domestic abuse, coupled with the financial difficulties she was facing, had made Bano a nervous wreck.

Married in 2006 to a tailor, the abuse started within a few years of the wedding, she claimed. Finally, in 2013, Bano filed a case of domestic abuse and dowry harassment against her husband. According to her, he had also started demanding more dowry as an excuse for harassment.

While her case is still pending in the Banda district court, she claimed the court directed her husband in 2016 to provide her interim financial support. But Bano, who has an 11-year-old daughter to support, alleges that she has not received any money from him since.

The Chingari Adalat women sing the organisation's anthem

The breaking point for her came in July, when a close relative sent her photos of her husband with his new wife. Bano claimed he remarried under an Islamic custom that allows him to do so without divorcing her first. She has, however, not filed any police complaint against him for the remarriage.

'He married another woman while I am running from pillar to post to find a job to feed my daughter,' she said. Once a teacher at a private school in Attara, with a monthly salary of Rs 3,300, Bano lost her job last year when the school closed due to the Covid pandemic.

Now, she has no support even from her own family. While she has enrolled herself at a tailoring course, she has no income as yet. "My parents are no more. My two brothers don't help me at all. I am managing to survive on the ration and free gas cylinder provided by the government. One of my three sisters has offered to take care of my daughter till I manage to get an income," she said.

As Bano broke down, Mubina brought her a glass of water, Meenakshi gave her a bracing hug, and a group of workers associated with the NGO picked up the anthem of 'Chup Chup rahna, ghut ghut jeena, ye baat humein manzoor nahin', to the beats of a tabla.

Finally composed, Bano, gets up to go to the nearby hand pump to wash her swollen, tear-streaked face. Her place is taken by 16-year-old Fiza, a victim of alleged sexual abuse. 'Uncomfortable with questions at the police station'

A resident of Banda Town, Fiza was alone at home — her mother had gone to collect ration — when a neighbour forcefully entered the house and attempted to sexually abuse her in June, she alleged. Over the next two months, she claimed, he attempted it twice more. Both times her mother, a daily wage labourer, was not at home. Her two brothers work in Ghaziabad, and Fiza and her mother are the only ones in the family living in Banda. The mother-daughter duo did not have the courage to go to the police station and file an FIR. Instead, Fiza's mother, who knew of Mubina's involvement with Chingari Adalat, decided to contact her. According to Mubina after she had explained to them the severity of the crime and the legal recourse available to them, they decided to approach the police.

'But at the police thana, I was very uncomfortable with the way questions were asked about the harassment. At Chingari Adalat it is different. I can see dozens of women with similar experiences and I can share my ordeal without being judged,' Fiza told ThePrint. Fiza's experience of discomfort with the legal proceedings is not isolated, claimed Mubina. The activist, who said she has been accompanying victims to police stations and courts for a while now, claimed that the language used at these places is intimidating and "patriarchal". Many survivors she has accompanied, didn't share their true experience as a result, she said, because they "feared being misunderstood, shamed or judged".

The gathering at Attara is representative of the way the organisation works. Weekly meetings are held every Sunday at the premises of the Vidya Dhama Society. According to Raja Bhaiyya, about 15-20 women come on an average at every gathering, and like Fiza and Bano, are counselled and provided legal help. Banda lawyers Manjar Ali, Rajender Singh, and Dwarkesh Singh take turns to be present at the meetings to help the survivors with legal advice.

From education to empowerment

When Raja Bhaiyya had started the Vidya Dhama Society in 2001, it was with the aim of providing education to girls, he said. Over the years, however, the NGO moved into highlighting human rights, agriculture and health-related issues in the region. A turning point came in 2019, when the NGO team saw women had stopped coming to the weekly baitakhi – a gathering organised to educate people about government welfare schemes and to create social awareness. When they enquired about it, they found it was because of the patriarchal mindset which imposed “purdah” on the women. Slowly, they also started hearing of cases of abuse which the women found difficult to express.

Thus was born the Chingari Adalat, a platform that would give voice to the sufferings often faced by rural women in silence, said Raja Bhaiyya.

‘We traced individual cases only to find that survivors of domestic abuse were not participating at the baitakhi. They were also not reaching the authorities due to the hostile environment in police stations and courts. At Chingari Adalat, the survivors are heard, counselled and helped in fighting their legal battles,’ said Raja Bhaiyya.

The Covid pandemic in 2020 and the resulting nationwide lockdown impacted the working of the organisation. Meetings of the Adalat were suspended for many months. After the second Covid wave, as the weekly gatherings resumed, Raja Bhaiyya said more and more women started turning up, eager to find an outlet for their sufferings.

The biggest challenge for the organisation, according to Mubina, is to make survivors aware of their own power and strength, to make them understand that they are not the “weaker sex”.

‘It takes several rounds of meetings and earning their trust, to bring them out of their trauma. We don’t tell them what women are commonly told here ‘samjhauta kar lo’ or adjust. Rather we do the hand-holding in the beginning and they turn out to be well prepared for their battles,’ Mubina added.

The confidence and determination to fight were clear in Bano, as she left the gathering.

‘Mujhe niranay chahiye, muaavja chahiye aur ab peedit hokar nahin rahna (I want closure, compensation and don’t want to live like a victim),’ she told The Print.

पंजाब में निराश किसानों व मजदूरों के परिवारों के लिए आशा की 'किरण', यू लड़ रही है हक हकूक की लड़ाई

इंदरप्रीत सिंह

22 अप्रैल 2021, दैनिक जागरण

नारी सशक्तीकरण को लेकर कानून बन रहे हैं। बावजूद इसके महिलाओं को कदम-कदम पर संघर्ष करना पड़ रहा है। फिर भी कुछ ऐसी हैं जिन्होंने अपनी कमजोर व्यवस्था पर सवाल खड़े करने के बजाय घर की झोड़ी पार कर खुद मैदान में उतरकर इस चुनौती को स्वीकारा।

मजदूर, कर्ज और आत्महत्याएं...। पिछले करीब एक दशक से पंजाब की यही कहानी रही है। किसान और मजदूर अपनी जरूरतों के लिए कर्ज लेते हैं, समय पर अदायगी नहीं पाती और कर्ज में डूबे इन लोगों का जब अपने भी साथ छोड़ देते हैं तो यह लोग आत्महत्या करने लगते हैं। उनके दुनिया छोड़ देने के बाद उनके परिवारों के हिस्से आता है वह दर्द जो वह किसी के साथ बांट भी नहीं पाते और घुट-घुट कर जिन्दगी जीने को मजबूर हो जाते हैं।

आत्महत्या कर चुके एक किसान की बेटी ने अब ऐसे लोगों को की जिंदगी बदलने के लिए नई पहल की है, जिससे यह परिवार अपनों के दुनिया छोड़ जाने और अपनों के रिश्ते तोड़ जाने के दर्द से बाहर निकलने लगे हैं। इसी बहादुर बेटी से मिलने आइए ले चलते हैं पंजाब के मानसा जिले के झुनीर गांव।

यहां डेरा बाबा ध्यान दास जी से करीब एक सौ मीटर की दूरी पर गांव के सीवरेज के पानी को साफ करके उसे सिंचाई के लिए प्रयोग करने वाले प्रोजेक्ट पर काम चल रहा है। तपती दोपहर में गांव की रानी कौर ने अपनी सहयोगी महिलाओं के साथ काम से खाना खाने के बाद विराम लिया है। वह डेरे के लंगर में भोजन करने के लिए पहुंचीं तो पता चला कि किरणजीत आज गांव आई हुई है। रानी कौर भोजन की परवाह किए बिना डेरे के तलाब के किनारे बरगद के पेड़ के नीचे बैठी किरणजीत के पास पहुंचती है।

किरणजीत दिल्ली से आई मीडिया टीम के साथ बात करने में व्यस्त है, लेकिन रानी से रुका नहीं गया। वह किरणजीत के पास पहुंची और एक ऐसे मजदूर परिवार के बारे में बताया जिसके मुखिया ने आत्महत्या कर ली। अब इस परिवार के बच्चों की पढ़ाई को लेकर मतक की पत्नी परेशान है। रानी कौर, किरणजीत से इस परिवार से मिल लेने के बारे में कहकर अपने परिवार की कुछ समस्याएं भी बताती है और काम पर लौट जाती है।

दरअसल, किरणजीत को यह सारी जानकारी देने के पीछे रानी कौर का मकसद मृतक मजदूर के परिवार को मदद दिलवाना है। क्योंकि जिन घरों के चिराग बुझ गए हैं उनके लिए किरणजीत 'आशा की किरण' बनी हुई हैं। आत्महत्या करने वाले किसानों और मजदूरों के परिवारों को सहारा और सहयोग देने के इरादे से 'पिंड बचाओ, पंजाब बचाओ' नाम से एक संगठन खड़ा हो चुका है जो आत्महत्या करने वाले किसानों और मजदूरों के परिवारों की बेसहारा महिलाओं की मदद और उनके बच्चों की पढ़ाई न छूट जाए, इसके लिए प्रयास कर रहा है। आर्थिक मदद दे रहा है।

किरणजीत बताती हैं कि असल में रानी कौर केवल मजदूर परिवार के बारे में बताने नहीं आई थी, बल्कि वह अपनी समस्या बताकर अपने मन का बोझ हलका करने आई थी। इनकी बात को सुनना जरूरी है। क्योंकि यही बोझ है जो किसी को अपनी जीवन लीला समाप्त करने के लिए उकसाता है, कर्ज तो सिर्फ बहाना है।

किरणजीत ने कहा कि जब भी वह यूनिवर्सिटी से घर आती है तो सारा दिन इन्हीं लोगों की व्यथा को सुनने में निकल जाता है। कई बार तो अपनी मां के साथ भी बैठने का समय भी नहीं मिलता। वह कहती हैं, 'जब मेरे पिता ने आत्महत्या की तो मैं इतनी निराश हो गई कि एक साल तक न घर से बाहर निकली और न किसी से बात की।' तीन एकड़ की छोटी किसानी के मालिक किरण के पिता ने अप्रैल, 2016 में कर्ज के बोझ के कारण आत्महत्या कर ली थी। लगातार दो साल कपास की फसल बर्बाद हुई तो वह कर्ज नहीं उतार पाए और आत्महत्या जैसा कदम उठा लिया।

किरणजीत ने कहा कि अक्सर किसानों की आत्महत्याओं के बारे में अखबारों में पढ़ती थी, लेकिन यकीन नहीं होता था कि कोई कर्ज के कारण अपनी जान दे सकता है। परंतु जब अपने पिता को अपने ही खेत में पेड़ से लटका पाया, तब लगा कि नहीं, कर्ज का बोझ बहुत भारी होता है। मेरी व्यथा जानने के लिए चंडीगढ़ से मीडिया की टीम आई तो मुझे उस पर गुस्सा आया कि उन्हें सिर्फ अपनी खबर बनानी है, परिवार पर क्या बीत रही है इससे उन्हें कोई मतलब नहीं। जाते समय वह अपना नंबर मुझे दे गए।

बकौल किरणजीत, 'मैंने उनसे कोई संपर्क नहीं किया लेकिन एक साल बाद वह फिर हमारे घर आए और उन्होंने कहा कि इस तरह निराश बैठे रहने से कुछ नहीं होगा। मुझे ऐसे परिवार वालों से संपर्क करना चाहिए जिन्होंने अपनों को गंवा दिया है। यह जानना होगा कि वह आज किस हालत में जी रहे हैं' किरण एक ही सांस में सब बोल गई। इसके बाद मुझे लगा कि इस दर्द से बाहर निकलना होगा। मुझे अपने गांव में मजदूर परिवार के मुखिया की आत्महत्या के बारे में पता चला। उसकी पत्नी बच्चों को कैसे पाल रही है, यह सब जाना।

उस महिला ने कहा, 'जब कर्ज चढ़ जाता है तो सब साथ छोड़ देते हैं। सभी को लगता है कि ये पैसे मांगने आए हैं।' तब समझ में आया कि कर्ज नहीं, अपनों के साथ छोड़ देने पर लोग आत्महत्या कर लेते हैं। क्योंकि उसकी बातें सुनकर ऐसा लगा कि हमारे साथ भी तो ऐसा ही हुआ था। क्या यह सबके साथ ऐसा ही होता है, मजदूर परिवारों की हालत तो बहुत ही खराब है। उनके पास न तो अपनी गुजर बसर करने के लिए जमीन है, न ही कोई और स्रोत। इसके बाद किरणजीत ने अपने गांव से जिला मानसा समेत सात जिलों में आत्महत्या करने वाले किसानों और मजदूरों के परिवारों से संपर्क किया। उनकी हालत जानी और यह पता किया कि क्या सरकार से इन परिवारों को सहायता राशि मिली या नहीं मिली। सरकार ने मजदूरों का कर्ज भी माफ करने का एलान किया था, उसका क्या हुआ? आत्महत्या करने वाले किसानों और मजदूरों की पत्नियां आज किस स्थिति में हैं। उनके बच्चों की पढ़ाई कैसे चल रही है?

ऐसे कई सवालों के जवाब ढूंढ लेने के बाद समाधान की तरफ कदम बढ़ाने की जरूरत थी। इसके लिए किरणजीत ने समाजसेवियों, पत्रकारों, डाक्टरों आदि के साथ मिलकर सेमिनार किए। लोकसभा चुनाव में सभी दलों के नेताओं के सामने यह सवाल रखे। प्रयासों में सफलता मिली तो 'पिंड बचाओ, पंजाब बचाओ' नाम से संगठन खड़ा हुआ जो अब आत्महत्या करने वाले किसानों और मजदूरों के परिवारों की महिलाओं की मदद के साथ ही उनके बच्चों की पढ़ाई के लिए मदद कर रहा है। करीब तीन सौ बच्चों की फीस समाज सेवियों से जुटाई जा रही है।



FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION : THE REAL TRUTH

In the policy-programme cycle, implementation plays a key role in achieving the policy objectives. However, implementation is not automatic, and it may be faced with various problems at each successive stage. Effective implementation requires a hierarchy of command and the capacity to coordinate and control. The media plays an essential role as a watchdog and keeps surveillance on the implementation of the policies. This section covers articles highlighting the differences in policy pronouncements and their implementation.

Despite being the world's second-largest digital market, India lags behind Pakistan regarding Internet speed according to Ookla's Speedtest Global Index. Vijay Sharma in his article, 'डिजिटल डिवाइड: एक जमीनी हकीकत' highlights a digital divide prevalent in India', which includes any uneven distribution in the access to, use of, or impact of information and communications technologies across communities. He cites the 'education divide' that India's rural and urban areas faced during the lockdown.

Shahina KK, based in Thamarassery, Kerala, in her article, 'Why The Road To Adoption In India Is So Long And Winding', highlights the lack of rigour in implementing the Juvenile Justice Act that keeps children in institutions instead of providing them with a family. She corroborates this argument by focussing on the vast gap between the total number of children living in shelters and those in specialised shelters.

History suggests that women are faring well on developmental indices, yet there is a gap between the specified percentage of representation and actual representation. In the case of Tamil Nadu, the representation of women in various fields is not adequate; a handful representing the entire state is a testament to this gender bias. 'Tamizhaga Arasiyalil Pengalukana Prathinithuvam Enga? (Where Is The Representation of Women in Tamil Nadu Politics?)', an article by Tamil Nadu based Indumathy. G addresses an important question - Why the State of Tamil Nadu needs more women politicians?

'Sex Workers in Asansol Sitting On A Ticking Time Bomb Of HIV/AIDS' written by Aritra Bhattacharya, highlights the suspension of Targeted Interventions Under National AIDS Control Programme' in Asansol, West Bengal, for the past four years. This suspension has denied sex workers in Asansol access to mandatory screening for HIV infection, free condoms, counselling on safe sex and anti-retroviral treatment.

When a Madras High Court judge exclaimed that he needed counselling to understand LGBT issues better, it won him praises. But it was also a pointer to the slow yet firm changes in the societal perception of the LGBT community and their problems. Indumathy's article 'Valimaiyadaiyum LGBTQ+ Samugathin Kural (Strengthening voices of LGBTQ+)' deals with similar perceptions hinting towards change around LGBTQ Issues in Tamil Nadu.

डिजिटल डिवाइड : एक जमीनी हकीकत

विजय शर्मा

11 जून 2021, दैनिक तरुण मित्र

'डिजिटल इंडिया' पर देश की सबसे बड़ी अदालत की टिप्पणी से डिजिटल डिवाइड का मुद्दा फिर हुआ प्रासंगिक। कोविड-19 के दौरान और चौड़ी हुई डिजिटल डिवाइड की खाई।

डिजिटल डिवाइड जैसा ढका-छुपा लेकिन संवेदनशील मुद्दा सुप्रीम कोर्ट की एक तीखी टिप्पणी से मौजूदा परिस्थिति में पहले से ज्यादा प्रासंगिक बन कर उभरा है। कोविड-19 से संबंधित याचिकाओं पर सुनवाई करते हुए कोर्ट ने न सिर्फ सरकार के डिजिटल इंडिया मिशन पर सवाल उठाये बल्कि सलाह भी दी कि कोई कदम उठाने से पहले जमीनी हालात से वाकिफ होना जरूरी है।

दरअसल, इस पूरे प्रकरण के मूल में है डिजिटल डिवाइड बनाम डिजिटल डिवाइड। अर्थात डिजिटल तकनीक की उपलब्धता में व्याप्त असमानता। देर सबेर ये मुद्दा उठना ही था क्योंकि भारत की आबादी के एक बड़े वर्ग के पास स्मार्ट फोन और इंटरनेट की पहुंच नहीं है। जैसे-तैसे फोन मिल भी जाये तो इंटरनेट का जुगाड़ मुश्किल। इंटरनेट मिल गया तो कनेक्टिविटी और स्पीड राम भरोसे। इसके अलावा महिलाओं तक डिवाइड और कनेक्शन दोनों की पहुंच कम है। वहीं लाखों-करोड़ों छात्र आज भी ऑनलाइन शिक्षा से जुड़ने के लिए तरस रहे हैं।

तकनीकें हमेशा क्षमता और सुविधा के अलावा अपने साथ जोखिम भी लाती हैं। डिजिटल डिवाइड, साइबर सुरक्षा, इंटरनेट पर निजता और ऑनलाइन माध्यमों पर मानवाधिकारों का उल्लंघन ऐसी ही कुछ नई मुश्किलें हैं। डिजिटल डिवाइड एक विश्वव्यापी समस्या है, रूप अलग-अलग हैं। विश्व के कई ग्रामीण और निम्न-आय वाले समुदायों के पास विश्वसनीय और किफायती इंटरनेट की पहुंच की कमी है। दुनिया के 40-45 फीसदी लोग अब भी इंटरनेट से वंचित हैं जिनमें विकासशील देशों की महिलाएं ज्यादा हैं। सिंगापुर में ब्रॉडबैंड डाउनलोड गति सबसे तेज है तो वहीं मोबाइल डाउनलोड स्पीड में दक्षिण कोरिया आगे है। अफ्रीकी देशों की हालत हर पहलू से खराब है। भारत में इंटरनेट उपलब्धता का आंकड़ा 50-55 प्रतिशत का है जबकि वह दुनिया का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा डिजिटल बाजार है। लेकिन स्पीड के मामले में पाकिस्तान से भी पीछे है। भारत में विभिन्नता और विषमता एक साथ बसती हैं। यहां का सामाजिक, आर्थिक, शैक्षिक ताना-बाना एकदम अलग है। एक ऐसा देश जहां असमानता, कुरीतियां, शोषण और विपन्नता आये दिन सुर्खी बन जाती हैं। यहां अब भी दो वक्त का भोजन, पीने का साफ पानी, जाति-क्षेत्रवाद, कुपोषण, स्वास्थ्य सेवाएं, शिक्षा और सुरक्षा एक बड़े मुद्दे हैं। ऐसे में सभी तक जल्द ही डिजिटल तकनीक की पहुंच और उपयोग की बात सहज नहीं लगती।

बहरहाल, सुप्रीमकोर्ट की पीठ ने वैक्सिनेशन का स्लॉट बूक करने के लिए कोविन ऐप पर रजिस्ट्रेशन की अनिवार्यता से जुड़ी विसंगतियों पर केंद्र से कहा कि "आप निश्चित रूप से पंजीकरण कर सकते हैं, लेकिन आप डिजिटल विभाजन का जवाब कैसे देंगे? आप डिजिटल इंडिया कहते रहते हैं लेकिन ग्रामीण इलाकों में स्थिति वास्तव में अलग है। झारखंड से एक अनपढ़ मजदूर राजस्थान में कैसे पंजीकृत होगा?"

इस तरह डिजिटल आधारभूत ढांचे की उपलब्धता यानी एक्सेस ज्यादा महत्वपूर्ण है। जहां यह ढांचा ही नहीं है या मामूली है, वहां डिवाइड होने का भी क्या मतलब? कैसा इंटरनेट और कैसा ऐप? एक्सेस न मिलना ही डिजिटल डिवाइड का प्रमुख कारण है। नतीजतन, समाज दो हिस्सों में बंट सा गया है। एक जिनकी पहुंच आधुनिक सूचना और संचार प्रौद्योगिकी तक है और दूसरे वे जिनके पास पहुंच सीमित है या नहीं है।

कोविड-19 के दौरान लंबे चले लॉकडाउन और डिजिटल निर्भरता ने इस खाई को और चौड़ा कर दिया है। संपन्न वर्ग को आज भी सब मुहैया है जबकि निर्धन वर्ग लगातार वंचित है। यह असमानता शिक्षा, व्यापार, सरकारी सुविधा के प्रयोग और स्वास्थ्य सुविधाओं के क्षेत्र में विशेष रूप से दृष्टिगोचर है। ये वही डिजिटल तकनीक है जो कोविड-19 से प्रभावित करोड़ों लोगों तक मदद पहुंचाने के एक शक्तिशाली माध्यम के रूप में भी उभरी। कई वेबसाइट्स, वेब पेज, ऐप और सोशल मीडिया ग्रुप के जरिये वालंटियर्स प्रभावितों तक पहुंचे। नागरिकों को जागरूक करने में आरोग्यसेतु के साथ ही सरकार की वेबसाइट और फेसबुक, ट्विटर, इंस्टाग्राम, लिंक्डिन जैसे सोशल मीडिया प्लेटफॉर्म ने महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई। लेकिन दूर-दूराज बसे ग्रामीण, निर्धन और डिजिटली निरक्षर जनता यहां भी हाथ मलती रह गई।

संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ ने 2016 में ही इंटरनेट तक पहुंच के अधिकार को मौलिक अधिकार के रूप में मान्यता देने की घोषणा की थी। यह भी कहा था कि इंटरनेट से लोगों को अलग करना मानवाधिकारों का उल्लंघन है। फिनलैंड जैसे छोटे से देश ने 11 साल पहले ही इंटरनेट एक्सेस को कानूनी अधिकार बना दिया था। अपने यहां सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने इसे संविधान के अनुच्छेद 19(1)(ए) के तहत मौलिक अधिकारों का हिस्सा बताया है वहीं 2017 में ही केरल हाईकोर्ट ने हर नागरिक के लिए भोजन, पानी और शिक्षा की तरह इंटरनेट को भी मूलभूत अधिकार की श्रेणी में माना था। लेकिन जमीनी हकीकत अब भी इससे मेल नहीं खा रही है।

सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने अपनी हाल ही की टिप्पणी में यह भी कहा कि “भारत में डिजिटल साक्षरता अभी पूर्ण से बहुत दूर है। आपको लचीला होना होगा और आपको जमीनी हकीकत को समझने की जरूरत है।” जाहिर है डिजिटल आधारभूत ढांचे और डिजिटल साक्षरता में बढ़ोत्तरी अब पहले से ज्यादा जरूरी है क्योंकि महामारी के दौरान इस पर निर्भरता कहीं ज्यादा बढ़ गई है। तकनीक रोज बदल रही है और उसके साथ चलने में ही समझदारी है। इस क्षेत्र में निवेश, नवोन्मेष, प्रतिस्पर्धा, और प्रशिक्षण भी सुनिश्चित करने होंगे। डिजिटलीकरण में हुए अब तक के काम की बदली हुई परिस्थितियों में समीक्षा के साथ ही कई नीतिगत परिवर्तनों की भी आवश्यकता है।

Why The Road To Adoption In India Is So Long And Winding

Shahina KK

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After three long years of search and struggle, Sreya and Nikhil (names changed), a Bangalore-based couple, managed to adopt a four-year-old boy. Sreya says she initially wanted a baby girl, a newborn, if that would have been possible. But the options were limited, and the couple finally went with the boy. It has brought happiness and joy into the lives of the childless couple. They are so relieved that they managed to adopt a child after so long.

But it is not as if there were not enough children to be adopted. According to UNICEF, India has 26 lakh children orphaned or abandoned. These children largely remain on the streets or child care institutions (CCI)—registered or unregistered—and most of them never get an opportunity to have a family, parents, siblings, relatives or a better life.

According to a study done by the Ministry of Women and Child welfare in 2018, the number of 'adoptable children in India was less than 50,000. India has 9,589 Child Care Institutions, of which 32 per cent are registered under the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act. According to the details provided by these institutions, there are 3,70,227 Children in Need of Care and Protection (CNCP) and 7,422 Children in Conflict with Law (CCL). Most of these children living in CCIs spend their childhood and adolescence in these homes, go out to work and start living a life of their own at the age of majority, without getting an opportunity to know what a family is.

Several studies have corroborated an enormous gap between the actual number of children abandoned and orphaned and those being adopted. "Though we have around 10,000 child shelters, the number of adoption agencies is only 340," says Smriti Gupta, CEO of Where Are India's Children (WAIC), a Pune-based organisation working for the rights of the orphaned children, adding that India is yet to develop an adoption culture.

She says that while several factors keep children in institutions instead of providing them with a family, a key factor is the lack of rigour implementation of the JJ Act.

The reluctance of the Child Care Institutions to register with the Specialised Adoption Agencies, the preference of parents for very young kids and the unwillingness of relatives to give the child for adoption are some other factors.

Procedural lapses

As per the procedure established by law, CCIs have to register with Specialised Adoption Agencies (SAA) under the JJ Act if they want to send the children for adoption. The Child Welfare Committee then makes an adoption inquiry for every child and ensures the child's adoption eligibility.

"All children are not completely orphans in the strict sense. Many of them might have one parent or relatives who do not agree to give the child up for adoption for several reasons," says Gupta. "There might be emotional factors, but it is also a fact that relatives have an eye on the property left to the child by either of the parents and are thus keeping the child in their control."

According to experts, the one solution is to make rigorous periodic analysis by the CWC on whether the relatives have a genuine interest in the child's welfare.

Usually, ChildLine or the Specialised Adoption Agency will present the child's case before the CWC. "They step in to enquire if the child has any relatives who are willing to take care of him or her. If they are to be taken in by relatives, the relatives must go through the

appropriate checks. If there is no relative who is willing to adopt, then the child would be declared legally free for adoption and thus should go to the adoption pool," says Gupta. The Juvenile Justice Act does not ensure a periodical review of the adoptability of a child living in a shelter. There is no fixed period or mandate to conduct a periodic review of the child's status. So even if the law or child's situation changes, the adoption possibility is not re-evaluated. Currently, regular checks happen at the CWC's discretion, which can vary widely.

Preference for young, 'normal' kids

On the other hand, there is the issue of preferences of the adopting parents. "The agony of waiting for childless couples occupies the dominant narrative in the discourse on adoption but nobody will tell you about their preferences," says Sunil Arora, the Executive Director of Bal Asha Trust, an authorised adoption agency in Mumbai.

"Most of the parents want very young and 'normal' kids. It is generally difficult for children beyond eight or ten years to go into adoption. Similarly, physically challenged children also are not chosen," Arora tells The Federal, adding that this sort of preference leads to repeated rejections of children.

Although there are 52,000 children in the adoption pool and 30,000 families are waiting for adoption in India, the average number of children being adopted a year is roughly 2,000.

"There is a need to change the perception," says advocate Shireen Merchant, a Mumbai-based lawyer who deals with adoption litigations. "Foreign parents prefer older children, but such Indian parents are very few."

Long stay in shelter homes

Once a child is assigned to a Child Care Institutions (CCI) or shelter, the child can end up spending their entire childhood at that institution, facing significant physical, emotional, and psychological risks. Furthermore, there are no checks or parameters to determine whether the child should continue an institutionalised life or whether the child should be made legally adoptable.

CCIs, too, are reluctant to send children into adoption for various reasons. The vast gap between the total number of children living in shelters and those in specialised shelters corroborates this argument.

"We have found that the institutions keep the children in their custody indefinitely, as it is a source of funds and grants," says Gupta.

Adoption rights activists demand that funding agencies and governments make it mandatory for childcare shelters to link themselves with authorised adoption agencies and ensure that children are eligible for adoption.

CCIs also do not request CWCs to review the adoption eligibility of children. As a result, children with no family, untraceable family, or unresponsive/unfit family continue to be reassigned to shelters rather than be evaluated to be made legally adoptable.

Illegal adoption and unregistered homes—a cause concern

As per data provided by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, out of 9,589 CCIs/Homes analysed, 91 per cent or 8,744 are run by NGOs. The state's share in this regard is 9 per cent (845 CCIs/Homes). Out of the 336 adoption agencies all over India, 20.2% are government-run, and 79.8% are non-government run.

This leads to another problem wherein parents go to illegal institutions for adoption.

"I have met many parents looking for illegal adoption. They go to unregistered institutions and take a child as this is an easier process for them," says Aparna Bhatt, a Supreme Court lawyer.

Aparna, who often represents organisations related to adoption, says the procedural flaws and the deficient number of children in the adoption pool make them go for illegal adoption. The parents who go for unlawful adoption are aware of the legal tangles involved in unlawful adoption, yet they go for the easier and quicker route. Tamil Nadu has the highest number of CCIs/Homes with 1,647 CCIs/Homes, followed by Maharashtra with 1,284 CCIs/Homes and Kerala with 1,242 CCIs/Homes. These three states account for 4,173 (43.5%) CCIs/Homes across the country.

The Federal's lawyers and activists unanimously expressed one concern—the absence of a check and balance system on unregistered Child Care Institutions in the country.

“Anything can happen—from child trafficking to child abuse,” says Gupta. Experts hold the view that India does not have an adoption mindset yet. ‘Right to family’ for a child is not widely understood. Identifying and moving eligible children through an adoption inquiry demands a lot of effort, but keeping the child continuously in a shelter is an easier option which becomes the default preference.

Many child shelters acknowledge that children want to live with a family in a home they can call their own. Yet, they admit there is a reluctance in exploring that path and putting children up for legal adoption.

'Tamizhaga Arasiyalil Pengalukana Prathinithuvam Enga?' (Where Is The Representation Of Women In Tamil Nadu Politics?)

Indumathy.G

31 May 2021, Hindu Tamil Thisai

'உங்கள் ஓட்டு உதய சூரியனுக்கு', 'உங்கள் ஓட்டு இரட்டை இலைக்கு', கடந்த ஒரு மாதத்துக்கு மேலாக தமிழகத்தின் பிரதான தேர்தல் பிரச்சார கூட்டங்களில் பெண்களின் குரல் ஒலித்து கொண்டிருக்கிறது'.

காலையில் வீடு, வீடாக சென்று தேர்தல் கட்சிகளின் அறிக்கைகளை பிரசுரித்து மதியம் அந்தந்த கட்சியின் தேர்தல் கிளை அலுவலங்களில் நாற்காலிகளில் அசதியா அமர்ந்திருந்து மாலையில் மீண்டும் பழைய உற்சாகத்துடன், கட்சிகளுக்கான ஓட்டு சேகரிப்பில் ஈடுபடுகின்றன இப்பெண்கள்.

கட்சியின் அடிப்படை உறுப்பினர்கள் பதவியில் இருக்கும் இப்பெண்களுக்கு எந்த அதிகாரமும் வழங்கப்படாது. அவர்கள் தொடர்ந்து மக்களை எழுப்பும் ஒலிப்பெருக்கிகளாகவே பயன்படுத்தப்படுவர்.

தமிழகத்தின் முக்கிய கட்சிகள் அவர்களுக்கு எந்த அங்கீகாரத்தையும், அதிகாரத்தையும் வழங்குவதில்லை என்பதே உண்மை.

கட்சிகளுக்குள் பெண்களின் செயல்பாடு என்பது அவர்களின் குடும்ப ஆண்கள் அனுமதித்தால் மட்டுமே தொடர்கிறது. இந்த தடைகளை எல்லாம் மீறி வரும் பெண்கள், அரசியல் கட்சிகளில் உறுப்பினர்களாகவும், குறிப்பிட்ட பதவிகளில் மட்டும் அங்கம் வகிப்பவர்களாகவே உள்ளனர். அவற்றில் ஒன்றுதான் கட்சிகளில் உள்ள மகளிர் அணி தலைவர் பதவி. இப்பதவியுடன் பல பெண்களின் அரசியல் பயணம் நின்று விடுகிறது. தலைமமைகளில்லா பெண்கள்

பெண்களுக்கு சமவுரிமை வழங்குவதற்கோ, அவர்களை சமமாக மதிப்பதற்கோ தற்போதுள்ள தமிழக பிரதான கட்சிகளில் சரியான தலைமை இல்லை.

அக்கட்சியில் உள்ள பெண்ணின் கணவர் அல்லது அவரது தந்தையார் சார்ந்தே பெண்களுக்கான மதிப்பீடு உள்ளது. வாரிசு பெண் தலைவர்களுக்கும் இதன் நிலைமை.

பெண்கள் இங்கு அரசியலில் பிரிந்து இருக்கிறார்கள் இதனைத்தான் இங்குள்ள ஆண் தலைவர்கள் பயன்படுத்தி கொள்கின்றனர்.

எங்கே பெண்களுக்கான பிரதிநிதித்துவம்?

கடந்த சில தேர்தல்களில் நாம் தமிழர் போன்ற கட்சிகள் தேர்தலில் போட்டியிடுவதற்கு பெண்களுக்கு சம உரிமை அளித்துள்ளதற்கு பாராட்டுகள் ஒருபக்கம் இருப்பினும், தமிழகத்தின் பிரதான கட்சிகளாக உள்ள திராவிட கட்சிகளின் 50 வருட ஆட்சிகாலத்தில் பெண்களுக்கான பிரதிநிதித்துவம் என்பது கரைச்சேரா கப்பலாகவே தத்தளித்துக் கொண்டிருக்கிறது.

ஏப்ரல் 6 ஆம் தேதி நடைபெறும் தமிழக சட்டப்பேரவை தேர்தலில் 3,998 வேட்பாளர்கள் களத்தில் நிற்கின்றனர். இதில் பெண் வேட்பாளர்கள் எண்ணிக்கை வெறும் 411 தான்.

177 தொகுதிகளில் போட்டியிடும் அதிமுகவில் இம்முறை 15 பெண் வேட்பாளர்கள் (2016

சட்டமன்ற தேர்தலில் இந்த எண்ணிக்கை 30 ஆக இருந்தது) மட்டுமே போட்டியிடுகின்றன. இம்முறை 173 தொகுதிகளில் போட்டியிடும் எதிர்கட்சியான திமுகவில் 12 பெண்கள் (2016 சட்டமன்ற தேர்தலில் இந்த எண்ணிக்கை 19 ஆக இருந்தது) மட்டுமே போட்டியிடுகின்றன. உலகம் முழுவது சமீப ஆண்டுகளாக அரசியலில் பெண்களின் பங்களிப்பு வளர்ந்துள்ளதாக, 'இண்டர் பார்லிமெண்டரி யூனியன்' அமைப்பு சமீபத்தில் நடத்திய ஆய்வில் தெரிவித்திருந்தது. ஆனால் இந்தியாவின் முற்போக்கு மாநிலமாக கருதப்படும் தமிழகத்தில் அரசியலில் பெண்களின் நிலை பின்னோக்கி சென்றிருப்பது நிச்சயம் அச்சம் தரக் கூடிய ஒன்று.

பாலியல் நிகர் நிலையில் தமிழ்நாடு தோற்றுவிட்டது - எழுத்தாளர் ஷாலின் மரியா லாரன்ஸ் "பெண்கள், ஆண்கள், சிறுபான்மையினர், தலித்துகள், மாற்று பாலினத்தவர் எல்லோரும் கலந்து ஆட்சி அதிகாரத்தில் இருக்கும்போதுதான் அந்த நாட்டோட வளர்ச்சி சரியான பாதையில் செல்கிறது என்று ஆய்வுகளும், வரலாறும் நமக்கு கூறுகின்றன. இந்தியாவை பொறுத்தவரை பன்முகத்தன்மை அதிகம். அவ்வாறு இருக்கும்போது பிரதிநிதித்துவம் மிக முக்கியமானது அல்லவா? அவ்வாறு இருக்கையில் பாலினத்திலும் பிரதிநிதித்துவம் மிக முக்கியமானது.

தமிழகத்தில் உள்ளாட்சி தேர்தலில் பெண்களுக்கான இட ஒதுக்கீடு என்பது முன்னர் 33% -ஆக இருந்தது. பின்னர் ஜெ. ஜெயலலிதா அதனை 50% -ஆக உயர்த்தினார்.

உள்ளாட்சி தேர்தலை தவிர்த்து சட்டமன்ற தேர்தல்களிலும், நாடாளுமன்ற தேர்தல்களிலும் பெண்களுக்கு இட ஒதுக்கீட்டை நாம் சென்றடையவில்லை.. இந்தியாவை பொறுத்தவரை தமிழகத்தை முற்போக்கு மாநிலம் என்று கூறுகிறோம். அவ்வாறு இருக்கும் போது அரசியலில் பெண்களுக்கான இடஒதுக்கீட்டை இங்கு யாருமே வலுவாக பேசவில்லை. இந்த முறை சட்டமன்ற தேர்தலில் திராவிட கட்சிகள், பெண்களுக்கு மொத்தமாக 6% தான் இடம் ஒதுக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது.

இதனை எவ்வாறு ஏற்று கொள்ள முடியும். அரசியல் வெறும் ஆண்களுக்கான சபையாகவே இன்றளவும் உள்ளது. இவ்வாறு இருக்கும்போது ஆண்கள் நிரம்பிய சபை எடுக்கும் முடிவுகள் எப்படி இருக்கும். சானிட்டரி நாப்கினுக்கு ஜிஎஸ்டி போட வேண்டுமா? பெண்களுக்கு கலைக்கலைப்பு என்பது எத்தனை மாதங்களுக்கு சட்ட ரீதியானது? பாலியல் பலாத்காரத்துக்கு உள்ளானவர் கருக்கலைப்பு செய்ய வேண்டுமா? போன்ற எல்லா முடிவுகளையும் இங்கு ஆண்கள்தான் எடுக்கின்றன. பெண்களுக்கு என்ன வேண்டும் என்பதை ஆண்கள் முடிவு செய்கிறார்கள். பெண்களுக்கான பிரதிநிதிகள் இங்கு கிடையாது.

சரி பெண்கள் அரசியலிலே இல்லையா? நிச்சயமாக இருக்கிறார்கள். இதனை நாம் தேர்தல் பிரச்சார கூட்டங்களில் காணலாம். பெண்கள் அங்கு ஆனி வேராக இருந்து செயல்படுகிறார்கள். உண்மையை கூற வேண்டும் என்றால் தேர்தலை இயக்குவதே பெண்கள்தான். அரசியல் கட்சிகள் தொடர்ந்து நிலைத்திருக்க அக்கட்சியில் உள்ள பெண்கள்தான் உழைக்கிறார்கள். இங்குள்ள அரசியல் கட்சிகள் பெண்களை அடிமட்ட வேலை செய்வதற்கே பயன்படுத்தி கொள்கின்றன. கட்சி நிர்வாகத்தில் பெரும்பாலும் பெண்களுக்கு இடம் அளிக்கப்படுவதில்லை. அதிகபட்சமாக கட்சியின் மகளிர் அணிக்கு பெண்களை தலைவராக போடுவார்கள் அவ்வளவுதான். கட்சிகளை பொறுத்தவரை பெண்களுக்கு எந்த அதிகாரமும் தராமல் அவர்களை ஒரு தொழிலாளியாக பயன்படுத்தி கொள்வார்கள்.

பெண்களுக்கு அரசியலில் உரிய இடம் கொடுத்தபின் தான், நாம் முற்போக்கு மாநிலம், முற்போக்கு கட்சி என்று பேச வேண்டும். திராவிட அரசியலை பொறுத்தவரை ஆரம்ப காலத்தில் பெண்கள்தான் கள செயல்பாட்டாளர்களாக இருந்திருக்கிறார்கள். ஆனால் 1950க்கும் பிறகு தமிழக அரசியலில் பெண்கள் எங்கு போனார்கள். கடந்த 50 வருடங்களில்

பெண்கள் அரசியலில் முக்கிய இடங்களில் இல்லை .

கோவிட் காலத்தில் எங்கு எல்லாம் பெண்கள் ஆட்சியில் இருந்தார்களோ அங்கு எல்லாம் தொற்று சிறப்பாக கையாளப்பட்டது. பெண்கள் இயல்பிலேயே நல்ல தலைவர்களாக இருக்கிறார்கள் என்பதை ஆய்வுகள் தெரிவிக்கின்றன .

பெண்களுக்கு போராட தெரியும், பெண்களுக்கு அவர்களது உரிமைகளை கேட்டு பெற தெரியும், ஆனால் நீங்கள் அவர்களுக்கான அதிகாரத்தை தர மறுக்கிறீர்கள். அரசியலில் பெண்களுக்கு வெற்றி சதவிகிதம் அதிகம் என்றுதானே புள்ளிவிவரங்கள் சொல்கின்றன. அவ்வாறு இருக்கும்போது ஏன் இடம் தர மறுக்கிறீர்கள். இக்கேள்வியை கேட்கும்போது நமக்கு ஒரு உண்மை விளங்குகிறது தமிழக அரசியலை பொறுத்தவரை வேட்பாளர் தேர்வு என்பது அவர்களிடம் உள்ள பணத்தை பொறுத்தது. பணம் தான் சீட்டை தீர்மானிக்கிறது. பெண்களிடம் பெரும்பாலும் சொத்துகள் இருப்பதில்லை. இதனால் அவர்களை வேட்பாளராக நிறுத்த கட்சிகள் தயங்குகின்றன. அப்படி கொடுத்தாலும் வாரிசாக உள்ளவர்களுக்குதான் சீட் அளிப்பார்கள் .

நீங்கள் திராவிடம் , சமூகநீதி பேசினாலும் உண்மையில் பாலியல் நிகர் நிலையில் தமிழ்நாடு தோற்றுவிட்டது. தமிழக அரசியலில் பெண்களின் குரல் எங்கே? என்ற கேள்வி வருகிறது. இவை எல்லாம் ஒருபுறம் இருக்க அரசியலில் இருக்கும் பெண்களுக்கு எதிரான தனிமனித தாக்குதல்களை நாம் தொடர்ச்சியாக பார்த்து கொண்டிருக்கிறோம். இந்தநிலை பெரிய தலைவர்கள் முதல் கட்சியில் தொண்டராக உள்ளவர்கள்வரை தொடர்கிறது. பாரம்பரியமான அரசியல் குடும்பத்திலிருந்து வரும் பெண்களுக்கே இதே நிலைதான் எனும்போது ஒரு சாமானிய குடும்பத்திலிருந்து வரும் பெண்கள் இதனை கொண்டு அச்சம்தானே அடைவார்கள் . கட்சி கூட்டங்களில் பெரும்பாலும் பெண்களுக்கு நாற்காலிகள் ஒதுக்கப்படுவதில்லை. . இதான் நிலை.

இவ்வாறு இருக்கும்போது அடித்தட்டிலிருந்து வரும் பெண்களுக்கு அடுத்தக்கட்டத்துக்கு செல்ல வேண்டும் என்ற எண்ணமே இல்லாமல் சென்றுவிடுகிறது. பெண்கள் சமமான அளவில் சட்டமன்றத்திலும், நாடாளுமன்றத்திலும் அமராதவரை சமூக நீதி என்பது இங்கு கேலிகூத்துதான் .

அரசியலில் பெண்களுக்கான அதிகாரம் வழங்குதலை நாம் தொடர்ந்து விவாத பொருளாக்க வேண்டும் .

அதுமட்டுமல்லாமல் பெண்கள் அரசியலுக்கு வருவதற்கான ஆரோக்கியான சூழலை நாம் ஏற்படுத்தி தர வேண்டும். இதனை ஏற்படுத்த வேண்டும் எனில் நாம் தொடர்ச்சியாக பெண்ணியத்தை பேச வேண்டும், அதனை நடைமுறை வாழ்வில் புகுத்த வேண்டும்”

பெண்கள் அரசியல் அதிகாரத்தை பறிகொடுத்துவிட்டார்கள்: சமூக செயற்பாட்டாளர் ஓவியா

”அரசியலில் பெண்களுக்கான அதிகாரம் என்பது குறித்து நாம் எல்லோருமே தேர்தல் நேரத்தில்தான் கவலை கொள்கிறோம். இந்த நிலை முதலில் மாற வேண்டும். ஏனென்றால், ஒருகட்சியில் ஒருவர் வேட்பாளராக தேந்தெடுக்கப்படுகிறார் என்றால் கட்சியில் முன்னதாகவே அவர்களுக்கு பொறுப்பு இருந்திருக்க வேண்டும். அவ்வாறு இருக்கும்போது ஒவ்வொரு கட்சியிடமும் உங்கள் கட்சியில் அடிப்படை உறுப்பினர்கள் பதவியில் எத்தனை % பெண்கள் இருக்கிறார்கள் என்பதை கேட்க வேண்டும். இது தொடர்பான அறிக்கையை அக்கட்சி தலைமை வெளியிட வேண்டும்.

இதிலிருந்துதான் நாம் நமது குரலை ஒலிக்க வேண்டும். தேர்தல் அறிவித்த 15 தினங்களில் நாம் இந்த கேள்வியை கேட்டால் யாரும் நம்மை திரும்பி கூட பார்க்கமாட்டார்கள். எனவே

நாம் அடுத்த தேர்தலுக்கு இப்போதிலிருந்து குரல் கொடுக்க வேண்டிய சூழலில் உள்ளோம். பெண்கள் அரசியல் அதிகாரத்தை பறிகொடுத்ததன் காரணமாகத்தான் இன்று சமூக பொருளாதார கல்வி அதிகாரங்களை பறிகொடுத்து நிற்கிறார்கள். உலகில் இரண்டு வழி அதிகாரங்கள் இருந்தன ஒன்று மத வழியிலான அதிகாரம், மற்றொன்று அரசு வழியிலான அதிகாரம். இதில் இரண்டிலும் அப்போது பெண்கள் இருந்தார்கள். ஆனால் இரண்டையும் பெண்கள் பறிகொடுத்துவிட்டார்கள். இதற்கு முக்கிய காரணம் பெரிய மதங்களின் தோற்றம். இந்த பெரிய மதங்கள் தோன்றலில்தான் பெண்களின் அதிகாரம் முழுமையாக வீழ்ச்சியடைந்தது. படைக்கும் கடவுள், காக்கும் கடவுள், அழிக்கும் கடவுள் இதில் எதுவையும் பெண்கள் இல்லையே? அவ்வாறு இருக்கும்போது பெண்களுக்கு எப்படி அதிகாரம் வழங்குவார்கள். எனவே நாம் தொலைத்த இடத்தில்தான் தேட முடியும்.

திராவிட கட்சிகள் பெண்களை அதிகாரப்படுத்துவதில் பின் தங்கியுள்ளது உண்மைதான். எனவே பெண் இயக்கங்கள் அவர்களுக்கு சமூக அழுத்தத்தை கொடுப்பதன் விளைவாகத்தான் பெண்களுக்கு உரிய அதிகார இடங்கள் கிடைக்கும். நாம் தொடர்ந்து பயணிக்க வேண்டும்” என்று தெவித்தார்.

இம்முறை தமிழக சட்டமன்ற தேர்தலில் ஆண் வாக்காளர்களைவிட 10 லட்சம் கூடுதல் பெண் வாக்காளர்கள் உள்ளனர். இதன்பொருட்டே அரசியல் கட்சிகளில் அறிக்கைகளில் பெண்களை கவர்வதற்காக இலவச வாஷின் மெஷின் போன்ற அறிவிப்புகள் வெளியிடப்பட்டுள்ளன. பெண்களை வெறும் வாக்கு வங்கியாக பயன்படுத்திக் கொள்ளும் அரசியல் கட்சிகள் அவர்களுக்கான அதிகாரத்தை தராமல் பறித்து கொள்கிறார்கள். நிச்சயம் இந்த நிலை மாற வேண்டும். மாற்றம் நிகழ வேண்டிய காலக்கட்டத்தில் உள்ளோம். பெண்களுக்கான அரசியல் பிரதிநிதித்துவத்தின் முக்கியத்துவத்தை உணர்ந்து செயல்படுவோம்.

* லாட்லி ஊடக கூட்டாய்வுக்காக எழுத்தப்பட்ட கட்டுரை.

இக்கட்டுரை உள்ள கருத்துகள் அனைத்தும் ஆசிரியரின் பார்வை தொடர்புடையது. இதில் கூறப்பட்டுள்ள கருத்துகளுக்கும் லாட்லி (Laadli) மற்றும் யுஎன்ஹெப்பிஏவுக்கும் (UNFPA) தொடர்பில்லை.

Sex Workers In Asansol Sitting On A Ticking Time Bomb Of HIV/AIDS

Aritra Bhattacharya

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For four years now, the 'Targeted Interventions Under National AIDS Control Programme' is suspended in Asansol, West Bengal, because of which mandatory screening for HIV and free condom distribution to sex workers have stopped. This has put a spanner in the works for India's fight against AIDS.

Asansol is West Bengal's second largest city and home to a large number of coal mines, factories and migrant workers. In its red light areas of Chabka, Lachipur and Sitarampur, thousands of sex workers eke a living. But, for the past four years, they have neither undergone the mandatory screening for HIV [human immunodeficiency virus] infection, nor have they received any free condoms or counselling on safe sex.

These are all part of the activities of the central government's 'Targeted Interventions Under National AIDS Control Programme' being implemented by the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO).

Murshida Sheikh, a sex worker from Asansol, has been running from pillar to post to get these activities restarted in the red light areas of this district headquarters of Pashchim Bardhaman, which is located about 210 kilometres from Kolkata.

Two months ago, on July 7, Sheikh wrote to the project director of the West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society, Abhishek Tiwary, highlighting the dire status of the sexual health of her community members and their clients.

"More than a thousand sex workers live in the red light areas of Chabka, Lachipur and Sitarampur... These areas are full of mines and factories, close to the Jharkhand border, and situated along National Highway 2... STD [sexually transmitted disease] and HIV cases are increasing here, and blood tests are completely suspended," the sex worker wrote in her letter.

"We are not getting condoms and the ICTC [Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre] is located over 18 km away and difficult to travel to," pointed out Sheikh who is also president of Asansol Durbar Samiti, a community-based organisation associated with the Durbar Mahila Samanway Samiti, that represents over 65,000 sex workers in West Bengal.

When Targeted Interventions stopped

Till 2017, the NACO's Targeted Interventions (TIs) worked efficiently in the neighborhoods in Asansol, with a number of services and facilities aimed at monitoring and improving the health of sex workers.

These workers underwent blood tests every three months to check for HIV infection, a doctor offered them free consultation and medicines for sexually transmitted diseases and other ailments thrice a week, and each one of them was provided with seven condoms per day.

Peer educators and outreach workers raised their awareness about HIV/ AIDS and sexual health and counselled them about safe sex practices, including the use of condoms. If required, the sex workers were connected to anti-retroviral treatment centres in case they tested positive for HIV.

However, things ran aground in early 2017 when sex workers and their families in red light areas accused some of the activists implementing the Targeted Interventions scheme of corruption. "They had no experience or exposure to sex work, did not even consult us about what interventions were required on ground, and swindled money," Rabi Ghosh, field

coordinator with Asansol Durbar Samiti, told Gaon Connection.

“We wrote to the district magistrate and the state government, complaining about corruption. We said we were ready to run the scheme on our own with full accountability,” said Ghosh, who is himself a son of a sex worker from Chabka. “But, after March 2017, funds for the scheme were stopped, and the scheme has not been restarted despite several letters and deputations to authorities,” he added.

Ghosh was an outreach worker under the Targeted Interventions scheme till March 2017 when things came to a grinding halt. According to him, even the mandatory HIV screening for sex workers has stopped and not a single screening camp has been organised by the government in the red light areas.

“We did conduct blood tests in the neighbourhood on a few occasions with help from the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Samiti, but these were few and far between. The distribution of condoms and awareness and counselling activities have also come to a complete halt as there are no funds,” Ghosh complained.

Sex workers and their family members receive ration distributed by local NGOs during the second wave of COVID-19. Photo: Rabi Ghosh.

Importance and scope of TIs

Targeted Interventions, designed and implemented by the NACO in collaboration with state AIDS control societies and NGOs/ community based organisations, constitute the cornerstone of India’s fight against HIV/ AIDS.

Aimed at high risk groups like sex workers, the interventions include funding and institutional support for one peer educator and one outreach worker per 100 and 250 individuals, respectively. These educators and workers provide condoms, lubricants and medicines to beneficiaries, and monitor their health.

Educators and workers are also supported by a doctor, a counsellor, a project manager, a project director and other staff at the cluster level, who organise regular health check-ups and awareness programmes, including mandatory HIV tests for all sex workers every six months as per the NACO guidelines.

Activists and community representatives from the sex workers’ community say that Targeted Interventions have been suspended in many red light areas in the country including places like Asansol that have a large floating population. This, according to them, has severely compromised India’s fight against AIDS and left sex workers and their clients highly vulnerable to HIV and other infections especially in the COVID19 pandemic.

“In addition to Asansol, targeted interventions for sex workers were suspended in many other parts of West Bengal like Islampur, Alipurduar, Panjipara and Suri for varying durations in the last two to three years,” Protim Roy from Durbar Mahila Samanway Samiti, told Gaon Connection.

“Since there was no periodic screening among sex workers, we just don’t know if they were HIV positive. Plus, during the lockdown, many of them returned to their native place, and carried on with sex work there, often without access to condoms, leaving the possibility of HIV infection and transmission wide open,” Roy said.

TIs suspended in several parts of India

Not just in West Bengal, Targeted Interventions have been suspended in other parts of the country too. “Take Ajmer in Rajasthan, for instance – our data shows there are around three thousand five hundred sex workers in the district, and their clients include foreign tourists who visit Ajmer all year round,” Amit Kumar, coordinator of the All India Network of Sex Workers – a forum that represents over 500,000 sex workers from 17 states in the country, told Gaon Connection. “Patna in Bihar has over four thousand sex workers and is also an important tourism centre. TIs were suspended in both Ajmer and Patna, for over a year or

more. There is no medical camp or condom distribution happening exposing sex workers and their clients to high risk," said the coordinator.

There is no official data in the public domain on the functioning of Targeted Interventions. The last annual report on these interventions available on the NACO's website is for the year 2018-19.

Emails with detailed questions regarding the functioning of Targeted Interventions, and instances and reasons for suspension were sent to NACO officials Bhawani Kushwaha, deputy director, TI, and Shobini Rajan, deputy director general, but these queries remained unanswered despite reminders.

Spike in HIV infections

While there is no official data on the functioning of TIs and their impact on HIV incidence, activists from sex workers' collectives and advocacy groups feared HIV cases were on the rise, more so owing to disruptions caused by the pandemic. In some cases, these fears were backed by evidence.

"Many sex workers who have been testing negative for years indicating they practised safe sex, have now tested positive for HIV," Meena Seshu from SANGRAM (Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha), a forum of sex workers in the Sangli, Satara and Kolhapur districts in Maharashtra, told Gaon Connection.

"When we spoke to them, we learnt that in many instances, when the sex workers returned to their native place during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, they carried on with their work, but with no access to condoms," Seshu added.

There was also the problem of sex workers not being able to insist on the use of condoms in rural areas, whereas in the urban centres, the awareness about the risk of unprotected sex is a lot more, she pointed out.

According to Seshu, it was because of initiatives such as the Targeted Interventions in red light areas, that fresh HIV cases were detected. "We were able to conduct periodic tests, detect the cases and link them up with Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres," she explained. "Suspension of the scheme, even in small pockets, means a break in micro-managing clusters with high risk of infection, which can be disastrous in our efforts to prevent HIV/ AIDS," the activist warned.

"Not providing sex workers with condoms, lubes and doctor consultations and medicines for STDs, even for a few days, makes them vulnerable and puts their lives in danger," Seshu stressed.

Amit Kumar from the All India Network of Sex Workers drew attention to the problems posed by lack of updated information on the Targeted Intervention scheme in the public domain.

"Say, I am a sex worker or have multiple sexual partners, and am concerned that I might have contracted HIV, who am I supposed to talk to or where am I to find information on testing centres and treatment," he asked. Yet, NACO does not provide any information on Targeted Interventions, Kumar said.

"Even when the interventions are suspended, the sexual act does not stop, and the chances of HIV infection and transmission increase substantially," Kumar pointed out. "But if we are in the dark about where to look for fresh cases, the fight against AIDS will receive a big blow," he cautioned.

Valimaiyadaiyum LGBTQ+ Samugathin Kural (Strengthening voices of LGBTQ+)

Indumathy.G

4 August 2021, Hindu Tamil Thisai

“நான் இந்த வழக்குக்கான தீர்ப்பை எனது இதயத்திலிருந்து எழுத நினைக்கிறேன். மூளையிலிருந்து அல்ல... இவ்வழக்கு தொடர்பான புரிதலுக்காக எனக்கு உளவியல் கல்வி தேவைப்படுகிறது. அதற்கான நேரத்தை நான் எடுத்துக்கொள்ள வேண்டும்”

- தன்பாலின ஈர்ப்பாளர்கள் தொடர்பான வழக்கை சென்னை உயர் நீதிமன்ற நீதிபதி ஆனந்த் வெங்கடேஷ் கையாண்டவிதம் அனைவரிடத்திலும் அவருக்குப் பாராட்டைத் பெற்றுத் தந்தது. 2018ஆம் ஆண்டு உச்ச நீதிமன்றத் தீர்ப்புக்குப் பிறகு, எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மீதான பொதுப் பார்வை மாறியுள்ளது.

அதிலும் குறிப்பாக தமிழகத்தில் இதுகுறித்த விவாதம் தொடர் பேசுபொருளாக மாறியுள்ளது. இதன் நேர்மறை விளைவுகள் சமூக, குடும்ப அமைப்புகள் மற்றும் சட்ட ரீதியாகவும் எதிரொலிக்கத் தொடங்கியுள்ளன.

ஆண், பெண் என்ற இருபாலினங்கள்தான் மனித சமூகத்தின் பிரதிநிதிகள் என்ற கருத்துருவாக்கத்தை நிலைநிறுத்துவதற்காக எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ பற்றி காலங்காலமாக மறைக்கப்பட்டு, அழிக்கப்பட்ட வரலாறு மீண்டும் வெளிவரத் தொடங்கியுள்ளது. அதன் விளைவாக ஒரு சமூகம் இப்படித்தான் இயங்க வேண்டும் என்ற பிற்போக்குக் கட்டமைப்பை நோக்கி வலுவான கேள்விகள் எழுந்துள்ளன. முதலில் இக்கேள்விகள் சிலருக்கு அதிர்ச்சியையும், ஆச்சரியத்தையும் அளித்தன. சிலரோ இதுகுறித்து சிந்திக்கத் தொடங்கி இருக்கிறார்கள்.

இதன் விளைவு எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்த புரிதல் மெல்ல மெல்ல அதற்கான இலக்கை நோக்கிச் சென்று கொண்டிருக்கிறது. அந்த வகையில் உணர்வு ரீதியாகப் போராடிக் கொண்டிருக்கும் இம்மனிதர்களை உள்வாங்கிக் கொள்வதற்கு தொடர் பிரச்சாரங்கள் தேவை. அதனை ஏதோ வகையில் இந்த கரோனா காலமும் அதனை சாத்தியப்படுத்தி இருக்கிறது.

எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களின் வாழ்வில் ஏற்பட்டுள்ள மாற்றங்கள், பணியிடங்களில் அவர்களுக்கு நேரும் சவால்கள் என்னென்ன என்று அவ்வமைப்புச் சார்ந்து இயங்கும் செயற்பாட்டாளர்கள் பகிர்ந்து கொண்டனர்.

பன்மை சார்ந்த அடையாளப் புரிதல் இல்லை: கோபி ஷங்கர் (தென்னிந்தியப் பிரதிநிதி, தேசிய மாற்றுப் பாலினத்தவர் கவுன்சில்)

”ஆண், பெண் எதிர் பால் ஈர்ப்பைத் தாண்டி, மனித இயல்பில் சுமார் 15க்கும் மேற்பட்ட பாலின ஒருங்கிணைவுகள் உள்ளன.

அவற்றை, பாலியல் ஒருங்கிணைவு (sexual orientation), ஆண் பெண் (எதிர் பால்) ஈர்ப்பு - (hetero sexual), நம்பி (gay), நங்கை (lesbian), ஈரர் (bisexual), பல ஈர்ப்பினர் (poly sexual), முழு ஈர்ப்பினர் (pan sexual), ஒரு பால் நெளிமையினர் (homo flexible), எதிர்பால் நெளிமையினர் (hetero flexible), சுழியர் (Asexual), ஈரார்வத்தினர் (bicurious), சுய ஈர்ப்பினர் (Auto sexual), இருமையின்மை ஈர்ப்பினர் (skoliosexual), ஆடவரீர்ப்பு (Androphilia), பெண்டிர் ஈர்ப்பு (Gyenophilia), திருநர் ஈர்ப்பினர் (Transfans), அரை ஈர்ப்பினர் (demisexual), நடுமை சுழியர் (gay sexual), திருநர் நம்பி (Transgay), திருநர் நங்கை (Translesbian) என்று குறிப்பிடுகிறோம்.

இவற்றில் திருநங்கைகள், நம்பி, நங்கை போன்றவர்கள் குறித்த புரிதல்கள் விழிப்புணர்வினால் ஏற்பட்டிருக்கிறது. எனினும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்த புரிதல் முழுமையாக இன்னமும் சமூகத்தில் சென்றடையவில்லை.

மாற்றங்கள் குறித்துக் கூற வேண்டும் என்றால் சட்ட ரீதியாக மாற்றங்கள் நடந்துள்ளன. உதாரணத்துக்கு இடையிலிங்க (Intersex Persons) அடையாளத்துடன் பிறக்கும் குழந்தைகள் இந்தியாவில் 13,000க்கும் அதிகமானவர்கள் உள்ளனர். இந்தியாவிலேயே இடையிலிங்க

குழந்தைகளுக்கான பாதுகாப்புச் சட்டங்களை முதல் முறையாகத் தமிழகம்தான் கொண்டுவந்தது.

எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களை வேலை ரீதியாக ஒருங்கிணைப்பதில் கார்ப்பரேட் நிறுவனங்கள் நிச்சயம் மாற்றத்தைக் கொண்டுவந்துள்ளன. அதை மறுப்பதற்கில்லை. ஆனால், ஒரு கார்ப்பரேட் நிறுவனத்தில் பெரிய ஆங்கிலப் பின்புலம் இல்லாத நம்பியோ (gay), நங்கையோ (lesbian) எதிர்கொள்ளும் பிரச்சினைகள், அதே கார்ப்பரேட் நிறுவனத்தில் நகரத்திலிருந்து வரும் நம்பியோ (gay), நங்கையோ (lesbian) எதிர்கொள்ளும் பிரச்சனைகளிலிருந்து முற்றிலும் வேறுபட்டவை. கார்ப்பரேட் நிறுவனங்களில் நியமிக்கப்படும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களின் பாதுகாப்பு, உரிமைகள் நலன் சார்ந்து அதிகாரிகளுக்கு, அவர்கள் அச்சமூகத்தில் இருந்து வந்திருந்தாலும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களின் பன்மை சார்ந்த அடையாளங்களைப் பற்றிய புரிதல்கள் அவர்களுக்கு இருப்பதில்லை.

அவர்கள் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்கள் சார்ந்த வரலாறுகளையும், அறிவியல் சார்ந்த உண்மைகளையும் தெரிந்து வைத்திருப்பார்கள் என்று நாம் உறுதியாகக் கூற முடியாது. இதன் காரணமாக அங்கு வெறுப்புணர்வே விதைக்கப்படுகிறது. அனைத்துப் பன்மை சார்ந்த அடையாளங்களையும் புரிந்துவைத்துக் கொள்ளும்போதுதான் சமூகத்தில் மாற்றம் ஏற்படும். இருப்பினும் பிற நிறுவனங்களைக் காட்டிலும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களுக்கான உரிமைகள் அளிப்பதிலும் பணி ரீதியாக அவர்களை ஒருங்கிணைப்பதிலும் கார்ப்பரேட் நிறுவனங்கள் சற்று முன்னால் உள்ளன.

அரசு நிறுவனங்களில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ பற்றிய புரிதல் இல்லாத சூழலில், அங்கு பணி செய்யும் பிற பாலின ஈர்ப்பு மக்களை எப்படிப் புரிந்துகொள்ள முடியும்? இத்தகைய சூழலில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களின் திறன் பாதிக்கப்படுகிறது. என்னைப் பொறுத்தவரை பணியிடங்களில் பெரிய அளவில் மாற்றங்கள் ஏற்படவில்லை என்றுதான் கூறுவேன்” என்றார்.

மாற்றம் தொடரட்டும்: ஃபெலிக்ஸ் (எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்து தொடர்ந்து குரல் கொடுத்துவரும் ‘ஓரினம்’ இயக்கத்தைச் சேர்ந்த தன்னார்வலர்)

“2014ஆம் ஆண்டு முதலே சட்ட ரீதியாக எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ சமூகம் மீதான பார்வை மாறிருக்கிறதா? என்று கேட்டால் நிச்சயம் மாறியுள்ளது.

நால்சா தீர்ப்புதான் இந்திய அளவில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ பற்றிய புரிதலை ஏற்படுத்திய முற்போக்குத்தனமான தீர்ப்பு என்று கூறுவேன். ஆனால், அந்தத் தீர்ப்பின் அடிப்படையில் கொண்டுவரப்பட்ட சட்டங்களில் முற்போக்குத்தனங்கள் இல்லை. உதாரணத்துக்கு நால்சா தீர்ப்பில் இட ஒதுக்கீடு வேண்டும் என்று வலியுறுத்தப்பட்டது. ஆனால், தீர்ப்பின் அடிப்படையில் இயற்றப்பட்ட சட்டத்தில் அதனை எல்லாம் குறிப்பிடவில்லை.

அதனைத் தொடர்ந்து 2018ஆம் ஆண்டு திருத்தப்பட்ட 377-வது சட்டப் பிரிவில் தன்பாலின உறவு என்பது சட்ட விரோதமானது அல்ல என்று உச்ச நீதிமன்றம் தீர்ப்பு வழங்கியது. நாடு முழுவதும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களால் இந்தத் தீர்ப்பு கொண்டாட்டத்தை ஏற்படுத்தியது.

அடுத்தது சமீபத்தில் சென்னை உயர் நீதிமன்ற நீதிபதி எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ தொடர்பான வழக்கைக் கையாண்ட அணுகுமுறையை வைத்துப் பார்க்கும்போதும், நீதித் துறைகளில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மீதான பார்வை அகன்றுள்ளது என்பதை உணரமுடிகிறது. எனினும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்து சட்ட ரீதியாக மாற்றங்கள் வந்தாலும் நிஜ வாழ்க்கையில் இன்னமும் நிறைய பிரச்சினைகளைச் சந்தித்துக் கொண்டதான் இருக்கிறார்கள்.

உதாரணத்துக்கு உங்கள் குழந்தை எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ பாலின சமூகத்தைச் சேர்ந்தவர்கள் என்றால், அவர்களை நாங்கள் மாற்றித் தருகிறோம் என்று பெற்றோர்களிடம் பணம் பறிக்கும் சிலர் உளவியல் நிபுணர்கள் என்ற பெயரில் இன்னமும் இந்தச் சமூகத்தில் நம்முடன்தான் நடமாடிக் கொண்டிருக்கிறார்கள். இதுதான் எங்கள் முன் நிற்கும் அடிப்படையான யதார்த்தம். இதனை நாங்கள் எதிர்கொண்டுதான் இருக்கிறோம்.

அடுத்தது பணியிடங்களை எடுத்துக் கொள்ளுங்கள், கார்ப்பரேட் நிறுவனங்களில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்த புரிதல் நிறையவே இருக்கிறது. பல கார்ப்பரேட் நிறுவனங்களில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்த விழிப்புணர்வு பிரச்சாரங்கள் அந்நிறுவனங்களால் முன்னெடுக்கப்படுகின்றன. அம்மாதிரியான

நிறுவனங்களில் வேலைவாய்ப்பு கிடைக்கும் நிலையில் நான் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ சமூகத்தைச் சேர்ந்தவர் என்பதை வெளிப்படையாகத் தெரிவிக்க முடியும். மேலும் அத்தகைய நிறுவனங்கள் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ பாதுகாப்புக்கு ஏதேனும் அச்சம் நேர்ந்தால் அவர்களைப் பாதுகாப்பதற்குமான கொள்கைகளையும் கொண்டுள்ளன.

ஆனால், இதற்கு எதிர்மாறாக கார்ப்பரேட் அல்லாத பிற நிறுவனங்களில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ சமூகத்தினர் சுரண்டப்படுகின்றனர் என்றுதான் கூற வேண்டும். உதாரணத்துக்கு எங்கள் அமைப்பிடம் உள்ள திருநங்கைகளைச் சில நிறுவனங்கள், பணியாளர்கள் தேவைக்காக அணுகும். ஆனால் அந்நிறுவனங்கள் அவர்களுக்கு அளிக்கும் சம்பளமோ சராசரி நபருக்கு அளிக்கப்படும் சம்பளத்தைவிட குறைவாகத்தான் இருக்கும். மேலும் இதுபோன்ற நிறுவனங்களில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ எதிர்கொள்ளும் பிரச்சினைகளும் ஏராளம். அடுத்தது அரசு அலுவலகங்களை எடுத்துக்கொண்டால், எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ சமூகம் சார்ந்த புரிதல் சற்றும் இல்லை. இதுதான் நிலை.

இம்மாதிரியான சூழல் இருப்பின் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ சமூகத்தினர் அரசு நிறுவனங்களை எப்படி அணுகுவார்கள்? இம்மாதிரியான நிறைய குறைகள் உள்ளன. என்னைக் கேட்டால் பள்ளிக் கல்வியிலிருந்தே மாற்றம் தொடர வேண்டும். அப்போது அதுகுறிந்த புரிதலை நாம் பரவலாக ஏற்படுத்த முடியும்.

இந்த கரோனா காலம் மற்றும் சமீப ஆண்டுகளாகவே எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்த விவாதங்கள் சமூக ஊடங்களில் நிறைய ஏற்படுகின்றன. இது எங்களது நம்பிக்கையை அதிகரித்துள்ளது. இந்த விவாதங்கள் முடிவு நேர்மறையோ? எதிர்மறையோ? இது தொடர்பான விவாதங்கள் எழுப்பப்படுவதையே நாங்கள் மாற்றமாகத்தான் பார்க்கிறோம். இந்த மாற்றம் தொடர வேண்டும்” என்றார்.

நேர்மறையான வருங்காலத்திற்கான தொடக்கம்:

சமூக வலைதளங்களில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்கள் குறித்து தொடர்ந்து விழிப்புணர்வு கருத்துகளைப் பதிவிட்டு வரும் மென்பொருள் வடிவமைப்பாளர் சூர்யா

“இந்த கரோனா காலம் வீட்டிலிருந்தே பணி செய்யும் சூழலை எனக்கு ஏற்படுத்திவிட்டது. இதனால் என் திருமணம் தொடர்பாக வீட்டில் பேசத் தொடங்கினர். இதனால் என்னுடைய பாலின ஈர்ப்பைப் பற்றி பெற்றோரிடம் தெரிவிக்க வேண்டும் என்று நினைத்து வந்தேன். இதனைத் தொடர்ந்து சுயமரியாதை மாதமான ஜூன் மாதத்தில் எனது பெற்றோருக்குக் கடிதம் எழுதினேன். அதனைப் படித்த எனது பெற்றோர்களுக்கு என் வருங்காலம் குறித்த அச்சம் இருந்தது. எனினும் அவர்கள் என்னைப் புரிந்துகொண்டார்கள். நான் விரும்பும் வழியில் எனது வாழ்க்கையை அமைத்துக் கொள்ள பெற்றோர் சம்மதித்துள்ளனர். இதில் எனக்கு ஒரு நேர்மறையான அனுபவம் கிடைத்திருக்கிறது. ஆனால், என் குடும்பத்தினர் எனக்களித்த அனுபவம் பிறருக்குக் கிடைக்கும் என்று உறுதியாகக் கூறமுடியாது.

எனினும், எங்களைப் பற்றிய பார்வை சமூகத்தில் அதிகரித்துள்ளது என்று நிச்சயம் கூறுவேன். அதன் விளைவுதான் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்களின் பிரச்சினைகள் தவிர்க்க முடியாத ஒரு சமூகப் பிரச்சினை எனும் பேசுபொருளாக உருவாகியுள்ளது. இந்தக் காலகட்டத்தில் சமூகத்தின் பெரும்பான்மை அடிப்படை சமூக அலகுகளான குடும்பங்களிலும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்த இறுக்கம் தளர்வது தவிர்க்க முடியாத ஒரு வரவேற்கத்தக்க மாற்றம். ஆனால், இந்த மாற்றங்கள் நடப்பதற்குப் பல காலம் பிடித்துள்ளது.

நேர்மறையான செயல்கள் நடக்கும் அதே நீதித்துறையில்தான் தன்பாலின ஈர்ப்பாளர்கள் திருமண உரிமை கோரி தொடரப்பட்ட வழக்கில் முரணான தீர்ப்புகள் வந்துள்ளன.

பணியிடங்களைப் பொறுத்தவரையில் இங்கு இயங்கும் பன்னாட்டு நிறுவனங்களில் மட்டுமே எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ குறித்த புரிதல் இருக்கிறது என்று கூறலாம். இதற்கு முக்கியக் காரணம், அந்தந்த நிறுவனங்களில் பத்தாண்டுகளுக்கும் மேலாகப் பணியாற்றிய எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்கள்தான். அவர்கள் இல்லையென்றால் இதுபோன்ற பார்வைகள் வந்திருக்குமா என்பது கேள்விக் குறித்தான். இதைத்தவிர, நகரங்களில் உள்ள சிறிய தொடக்கநிலை நிறுவனங்களில் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்கள்

பற்றிய புரிதல் வந்திருக்கிறது. இத்தகைய இடங்களில் சிரமங்கள் ஏற்படுவதில்லை.

ஆனால், அமைப்புசாரா மற்றும் சிறு குறு நிறுவனங்களில் பணிபுரியும் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்கள் தங்கள் அடையாளத்தை வெளிப்படுத்துவது அவர்களின் வேலைக்கு மட்டுமில்லாமல் உயிருக்கே பாதிப்பை ஏற்படுத்தும் நிலைதான் இன்றும் இருக்கிறது. இதுபோன்ற இடங்களில் அடையாளத்தை வெளிப்படுத்திக் கொண்டால் கசப்பான அனுபவமே கிடைக்கும்.

இதிலிருந்து எங்களைக் காத்துக்கொள்ள தொழிலாளர் நலச்சட்டத்தில் கூட இடமில்லா நிலைதான் உள்ளது.

எனினும் எங்கள் கண் முன்னால் சமீபத்தில் நடத்து வரும் மாற்றங்களை நேர்மறையான வருங்காலத்திற்கான தொடக்கமாகவே கருதுகிறோம்” என்று சூர்யா தெரிவித்தார்.

“என் சகோதரர்களே நான் என்னைக்கண்டுபிடிக்க முயன்றேன். அதில் தோல்வி அடைந்துவிட்டேன். என்னை மன்னியுங்கள். இந்தப் பயணம் மிகவும் கடினமானது நண்பர்களே. இந்தப் பயணத்தை எதிர்கொள்ள நான் பலவீனமாக இருக்கிறேன். என்னை மன்னியுங்கள். இறுதியாக இந்த உலகிற்கு... நீங்கள் கொடு ரமானவர்கள். இருப்பினும் நான் உங்களை மன்னித்துவிட்டேன்”

- எகிப்தைச் சேந்த சாரா ஹெகேசி எழுதிய தற்கொலைக் கடிதம் இது.

எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ சமூகத்தின் அடையாளமாகக் கருதப்படும் வானவில் கொடியைப் பறக்கச் செய்தற்காக அவருக்கு சிறை தண்டனை விதிக்கப்பட்டது. சிறையில் பாலியல் துன்புறுத்தல்களை சாரா அனுபவித்தார்.

விடுதலைக்குப் பின்னர் எல்ஜிபிடிக்கூ+ மக்கள் பற்றிய சமூகப் புரிதலுக்குத் தொடர்ந்து ஓயாமல் குரல் கொடுத்து வந்தார். எனினும் தனது வலிகளைத் தாங்கிக் கொள்ளாமல் சாரா தனது மூச்சைக் கடந்த ஆண்டு நிறுத்திக் கொண்டார்.

எகிப்தின் சாரா மட்டுமல்ல நம் நாட்டிலும் குரல்கள் நசுக்கப்பட்ட இம்மனிதர்கள் ஆங்காங்கே தங்களது உயிர்களை மாய்த்துக் கொள்கிறார்கள். இந்நிலை மாற வேண்டும். அவர்களின் குரல்கள் வலிமையாக ஒலிக்கப்படவேண்டும். அதற்கான பாதையை முன்னெடுக்கும் கடமை ஒவ்வொரு அறிவார்ந்த சமூகத்துக்கும் உள்ளது. அதன்படி வரும் காலங்களை எதிர்நோக்குவோம்



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Puja Singh

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Vijay Sharma

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3. बाल विवाह : काल बनता कोरोना काल
4. सशक्त पंचायतों से होगा क्षेत्र का कायाकल्प - आरती

Inderpreet Singh

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Jyoti Yadav

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