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Laddi

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

Edited by Dr. A. L. Sharada & Revathi Asokan

# Breaking News

## Challenging Gender Barriers



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An Initiative by Population First

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May 2017

# From the Editors Desk

I am happy to present 'Breaking News – Challenging Gender Barriers' the third volume of our award winning entries of the last three editions of the Laadli Media and Advertising Awards (LMAAGS) for Gender Sensitivity, one of its kind awards in the world. In the span of the last eight editions of the awards, a lot has changed. We have been receiving close to 1500 entries every edition, particularly from younger people, which is heartening. The themes are more bold, the subjects more varied and the questioning more critical.

The most critical change we feel is the emergence of online publications, which give space to a wide spectrum of groups to voice their issues, concerns and perspectives. A large number of feminist magazines are doing amazing work - LadiesFinger, Feminism in India to name two. Other online magazines like Deep Dives, Out of Print and Youth ki Awaaz are also raising pertinent gender issues in their special editions. Mainstream papers are also not far behind with their online editions affording them lot more freedom and flexibility than the print versions.

No wonder then digital publishing and advertising are emerging as the new big trend with social media amplifying the audience and creating a buzz helping the brand, the agency and the cause. A look at the media writings and advertisements featured in this book bear testimony to the above observation.

'Breaking News' is a compilation of 61 award winning entries reporting on nine themes – Social Issues, Genders and Sexualities, Trafficking, Gender Based Violence, Women and Work, Women and Politics, Women and Conflict, Gender Issues in Programme Implementation and Emerging Social Trends. It is a multi - lingual publication where we tried to give a fair representation to the writings in regional languages as well. We had the not so pleasant task of picking and choosing the articles for this book. The only criteria was to bring to our readers a collection of works written from refreshingly new perspectives. We had to keep aside many deserving entries and shorten some very long articles due to the size limitations of this publication. Hopefully, we would be able to put together the fourth volume soon.

I hope this book provides you new insights and a riveting experience of exploring the unexplored.

While the positive stories are exhilarating, the personal stories of extreme brutality and unimaginable violence perpetrated on the transgender persons, girls forced to go through Female Genital Cutting and women trapped in abusive marriages numbs

our senses. But these stories also need to be told to strengthen various advocacy initiatives stop the practices.

Sometimes numbers speak louder than words, and media persons have been increasingly using data from various sources to drive home the point that gender discrimination is rampant in our society; be it in the workplace or in getting basic health care or availing treatment for life threatening diseases like cancer. One cannot but feel shocked by the stark picture the data draws of the deep rooted gender biases in the country.

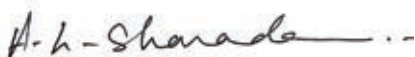
Yet some other articles make us wonder and feel fascinated at the new emerging trends and the social factors behind those - be it the participation of husbands in birthing process or the increasing use of stereotyping and shaming of women in the comedy shows.

The analysis of the corruption, misuse and inefficiency in the system while implementing programmes and policies is bound to agitate us; it may motivate some of us to change the situation.

We hope this publication would be used extensively by media persons to get new insights and perspectives. The vision of Laadli Media Advocacy is to make gender sensitivity an integral value of good journalism and communication.

I am happy to share with the readers that an Abby is instituted for gender sensitivity by Ad Club and AAAI at the Goa Fest in 2016.

I cannot conclude this note without expressing my special thanks to Mr.Sista for his editing inputs, Srinidhi Raghavan for being our sounding board and Venu Gawali for her patient and willing support to take care of the nitty gritty involved in publication. We are grateful to all our contributors for their support. This book would not have been possible without the support of UNFPA which part funded the book and Mr Maneck Davar who defrayed the remaining cost.



**Dr. A. L. Sharada**  
Director, Population First

# Scope of *Laadli* Media Awards

- . Covers 28 States and 6 union territories of India
- . 13 languages
- . Entries increased from 120 in 2007-08 to 1500+ in 2015-16

## Media

**Advertising:** Print, TV, OOH, Radio, Digital, Direct Mail

**Print:** Newspaper, Magazine And Feature Service

**Electronic:** TV, Radio

**Web**

**Other Media**

## Categories

Service, Product and Public Service

News Features, Features, Investigative Reports, Editorials, Op-Eds and Columns

News Features, Features, Documentaries, Serials, Radio Plays, Topical Programmes and Issue Based Programmes

News Features, Features, Articles, Blogs and Columns, Special Editions

Dance, Dance-Drama, Theatre, Feature Films, Cartoons, Multi-Media, Books

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# Social Issues

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The patriarchal norms, values and systems create a number of practices, customs and beliefs which reinforce the power of men over women, justifying violence, discrimination and control. However, these social practices, customs and behaviours are further reinforced by the emerging economic and political developments in the society.

Yogesh Pawar, for instance, explores how with the increasing drought conditions and poverty, the practice of dedicating daughters to deities is gaining momentum in rural Maharashtra. Except that, it is now being driven by flesh traders and traffickers. Mamata Sharma and Parveen Sultana also unravel the role of patriarchal power structures in the increasing instances of witch hunting in the country. These incidents are not so much an outcome of superstition and blind beliefs but represent systematic use of violence in the garb of traditional practices to silence or annihilate women who challenge the powerful men and groups in the community by asserting their rights or resisting their attempts to exploit them sexually or otherwise.

Similarly, while there may be many social cultural reasons behind child marriages, the contribution of increasing drought conditions and seasonal migration of parents on child marriages cannot be ignored. Thulasi documents the stories of young married students in the schools of backward districts of Telengana State. Jyothi Shellar draws our attention to yet another form of discrimination – denial of medical attention to girls suffering from cancer.

Female Genital Mutilation is yet another heinous practice that aims to control the sexuality of women by mutilating their genitalia to deny them their sexual pleasure. While Mariya Ali presents the personal trauma of undergoing the procedure as a child and the deep psychological and emotional scars that it left behind, Mini Thomas presents a comprehensive analysis of the issue highlighting the resistance from within the Bohra Muslim community in India.

Menstruation had suddenly become a headline issue with the campaign of women activists to protest against the denial of entry for women into certain religious shrines. Demystifying the myths, challenging the taboos and creating awareness about the health consequences of poor hygiene and sanitation practices during menstruation have received considerable media coverage in the last couple of years. While Urmila launched an awareness campaign, Aarefa Johari talks about menstruation and the challenges faced by sports women and calls for greater sensitivity on the part of coaches and sports administrators.



## DAUGHTERS OF DROUGHT: THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF POVERTY IN THE PARCHED LANDS OF KARNATAKA AND MAHARASHTRA

*DNA, May 1, 2016*

*As the drought tightens its grip and the struggle for everyday survival becomes increasingly difficult, the devdasi tradition of dedicating girl children to Goddess Yellamma is making a comeback. Yogesh Pawar travels to the parched lands of Karnataka and Maharashtra to document lives caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and desperation*

**T**he crowds are thinner than the full-moon festival of Bharat Hunnime in January, but there's still barely any space to move. The streets leading to the famed Goddess Yellamma temple in Saundatti, Karnataka, are lined with shops selling fruits, garlands, bangles, coconuts, camphor, incense sticks and saris, along with the huge mounds of vermilion and dry yellow dye that is smeared on devotees. Done with their darshan, devotees gather under the cool shade of a neem tree to get some respite from the oppressive summer heat. Some cook, some settle down to lunch and others rest after a clearly tiring pilgrimage.

Whether from Telangana or Rayalaseema in Andhra Pradesh, Gulbarga and Bellary in Karnataka or Marathwada and Solapur in Maharashtra, they talk of little else but the worst drought of the century that has gripped their villages. It's this – crops failing, jobs drying up along with sources of water and widespread hunger – that has led to crowds swelling at the temple dedicated to Yellamma, the goddess associated closely with devdasis. The tradition of dedicating girls from lower castes created by upper castes to sexually exploit them is making a huge comeback across the drought belt, notwithstanding the law, say activists and priests too.

Says BL Patil of Vimochana Devadasi Punarvasthi Sangha (VSPS), "There are nearly 50,000 plus devdasis according to the union ministry of women and child development. These women end up becoming conduits to bring girls from families under duress for dedication. Between selling them directly to the flesh trade and dedication, the latter is preferred because it is given sanction by religious tradition."

Unmindful of her mother's calls to lie down, little Soubhagya Humbe from Chincholi village in Maharashtra's Latur district runs around while her maternal uncle haggles for a better price for their humble lunch of jowar rotis and chilly chutney. Dedicated to the goddess as a child bride, the nine-year-old doesn't know what lies ahead. For now, she's excited about her first visit outside the village. Once dedicated, rights to virginity are auctioned and young girls like Soubhagya are pushed into prostitution, just like her grandmother Lakshmi was, and later, when they are old, reduced to begging with a basket bearing a brass bust of the goddess.

Lakshmi curses her son-in-law who went to find work in Pune last year after the crop failed. "He never came back. I'd used all my life savings in getting my daughter married and now she's back with two children. My son's let them stay, but for how long? Ultimately, we had to find a way out," she weeps, pointing to Soubhagya and recalling how she became a devdasi and was pushed into prostitution to support the family. "Looks like this is what Mother Yellamma wants for us."

According to priests at the temple, in Karnataka's Belgaum district, this is the first time girls are being brought to be dedicated to Yellamma in April. "It'd happen only between October and February. Also, until about 10 years ago, the numbers had reduced to a trickle, but there's been a surge in dedications over the last three years," said one of them on condition of anonymity.

Offering girls as child brides to the Goddess had been made officially illegal since 1984. "All it has done is make everything hush-hush and increase corruption," he says. Brushing off any guilt, he laughs. "I'm not here to be a social reformer and make enemies of other priests. Look at the cops, they simply need ₹500 to look the other way. They're happy, the girl's family is happy, the temple's happy. I don't want to stick my head out to disturb that."

This desire to not disturb the status quo plays out in a cruel narrative over 400km away in the Matang settlement, off Latur's last village Mamdapur on the Maharashtra-Karnataka border. Barely 10, Ratna stands out. Dressed in traditional parkar-polka, there is something characteristically stylised and acquired about her posture as she tucks into her meal.

"I dedicated her as a devdasi in January," her mother Mahadevi Arasale says. "She eats before all of us, even the men. We don't want Yellamma to be angry." The fiery tang of the hot brinjal curry makes the kajal in Ratna's doe eyes run. The mother calls out to her youngest, Mallikarjuna, to fetch some jaggery from a neighbour. Her octogenarian father-in-law Hirappa sits outside, staring glassy-eyed through the door at the girl eating. "He spends

all the ₹600 he gets from the government as pension for elderly on his drink and bidis. The son's died and left this wretch for me to take care of," Arasale yells, slamming the tin door. "Don't stare! You'll give her an upset stomach."

Her voice edgy and trembling, the mother of four daughters and a son rationalizes the decision she has made for Ratna, "It's not like the old man's earnings. I have to think of everyone." Arasale says the dedication came after several hardships over the last five years. Landless labourers like her family have found work increasingly hard to come by. "With successive droughts and crop failures, rich farmers who'd otherwise vie to hire us, have lesser and fewer days of work even as far as Narayangaon over seven hours away in Pune district."

She still thinks of the picturesque town on the Pune-Nashik road as cursed. That's where she had lost her husband to jaundice in 2012. "If it wasn't for financial support from my sister Netravati in Aurangabad, I don't know how I'd survive."

But why dedicate her own daughter?

"Netravati, who was also dedicated very young, suggested it."

The visiting elder sister spits out her paan and says, "That's right. Blame me. I'm the bad prostitute." Unapologetic and open about her sex work, she shakes her head. "It's all Her doing. When Mother Yellamma shuts a door, she opens another." After it was decided that Ratna would be offered to the goddess, a benefactor was found to fund the trip to Saundatti and to buy the gold stone in the mangalsutra.

Both Arasale and Netravati are full of praise for Arjun Patil, the benefactor. "Right from hiring the jeep to go to Saundatti, to sending us ₹1,000-1,200 every other month, he's been very generous. He even sent ear studs for Ratna this Yugadi."

The story of desperation finds echo across the region.

The settlement of Lambani nomads outside Alur village in Osmanabad in drought-hit Marathwada is an assortment of straw huts and shanties. An old cow sits in the hot sun, her ribs jutting. "She can't bear calves, so there's no milk and now, thanks to the beef ban, no one wants to buy her. Since I can't sell the cow I had to sell my daughter Kaveri," weeps Kamalibai Nayak. Guilt-ridden with the dedication of her daughter last October at Saundatti, she equates it with selling. "If I go back on my word, I'll have to return nearly ₹20,000 to the saukar's (moneylender) who funded the dedication. That's a lot of money. Also, it'll invite the Goddess' wrath."

It all began in 2011. "Because of drought, we had no work. When my husband developed a growth in the groin which needed surgery, I had to find money." When his condition turned critical around Diwali last year, she borrowed money from a local money lender (who works for Arjun Patil) for surgery. He asked her to join a jogatin(middle-aged)-devdasi, called Tipamma, on a pilgrimage to Saundatti where a deal for 11-year-old Kaveri was struck.

Unlike a shy Ratna, Kaveri won't stop talking. "I want to continue going to school but now after the dedication in January, my mother won't let me." She remembers it being very cold and the water in the holy tank at Saundatti being filthy. "But my mother told me that if I didn't agree to it, I'd lose my father." After the ritual bath, she was draped in a neem branch skirt and made to trudge up the hill with a pot of water. "I was dressed there like a bride in new sari and cowrie shell necklaces and the priest kept asking me to make vows. I was scared and simply said yes to everything so that it'd be over quickly." She was then asked to quickly change into regular clothes and was brought back home. "We have to keep it quiet since it can lead to police problems," points out the mother.

Across the Karnataka border, we meet 16-year-old Renuka Mallikarjuna outside Raichur's civil hospital, where she was brought for an STD infection. "A client who knew he was infected beat me up when I asked him to wear a condom. He forced himself on me and hurt me on my vagina with a blade," says the teen, who was dedicated five years ago. Though on a break till she heals, she doesn't want to go home visiting her mother two hours away at Salaguna village in Sindhanur tehsil. "She's herself a devdasi and knew what this means. Yet she dedicated me. I was only 14 and resisted the touch of men, fighting them off. After months of being beaten senseless, kicked in my chest, tied spread-eagled and raped, I had to make peace with my destiny."

The story of brutality finds echo 280km away, in Mahalingpur town of Bagalkot district. "My grandmother and mother were both devdasis and told me to decide whether I want to be a doll in others' hands or run my life on my own. In their view, being devdasi meant more freedom than married women," recalls Suvarna Indugoundru, who is in her late 40s.

Articulate and vocal about livelihood issues, this strong voice of the local sex workers' community is just back from an Ambedkar Jayanti rally in Miraj town, 100km away. "I am fed up of the condescension and patronising by Mahar leaders. They never fail to underline how the devdasi-turned-sex workers are Dalit and how the clientele are upper caste and ask me to work as a domestic help instead," she points out. "When I tell them to match my earnings in sex work and hire me as a maid in their homes, they just shut up. Upper castes just

want sex, but the moralising by Mahar leaders is often worse." As someone well connected with the community network, she observes, "Dedications are going up again over the last three-four years. Unlike us, who'd never seen the insides of a school, shockingly many of these young girls are often pulled out of school."

According to her, the network of middlemen on the prowl has increased its presence. "Whenever there is a calamity, they appear, knowing that this is the best time to pick girls for brothels in Mumbai and Pune. The family gets a pittance compared to the money they make."

About 30km away in Jamkhandi, we meet Arjun Patil for the other side of the story. Everything from his metal-tinted glares, all-white outfit, shining Bullet at the door and the bevy of young sidekicks in Being Human knock-offs, screams money. His own family deity, the Goddess Bhavani of Tuljapur, does not enjoy as much of a pride of place both in position and size as goddess Yellamma on the wall behind him. Across the room, Ajay Devgan stares down from a wall. "All that you see is Yellamma's blessing," says the 35-year-old, a class nine dropout.

The woman of the house who comes bearing plates of susheela (poha-like preparation of puffed rice) is told to shut the door behind her and he lets Katrina Kaif finish gyrating to Chikni Chameli on TV before continuing his boast. "This year's Neeramanavi Yellamma jatra in January at Saundatti was exceptionally good. I sponsored nine dedications to Yellamma." Isn't that a lot of money? "Yes it is. But you know, it is an investment. It'll all come back several times over. In fact, in some cases like the fair-skinned and light-eyed Kaveri or the dusky but sharp featured Ratna, I'm happy to give the family a little something every month or two to keep them tied to me till they get their first period."

Once the girls reach puberty, their virginity is auctioned to local businessmen, landlords or brothel-keepers, Patil explains matter-of-factly. While he refuses to discuss money, he's more forthcoming when asked what happens to the girls later. "After that, it is their destiny. Some end up becoming regular keeps of the well-to-do till they're young and desirable. With the exception of a rare few, later, most join the others who become prostitutes. Unless they are smart, by the time there are in their mid-40s, most go back to begging."

So is there no way to break this vicious cycle? The answer to that depends on who one is talking to. "Yes," says anti-trafficking activist Shyam Kamble, who works with the community of jogatins. "We will have to mobilise and raise awareness about how this socio-cultural practice is yet another way for upper caste men to sexually exploit lower-caste women."

Meena Seshu, of the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW) who runs SANGRAM, a grassroots health and human rights NGO for sex workers for more than two decades, has a different view. She speaks of the need to look deeper into systemic causes like inequitable distribution of water, rural poverty and lack of income generation avenues. "That is causing the distress that pushes young girls into being dedicated. Till we address those, anti-trafficking intervention won't work." She says many women find being a devdasi empowering. "The jogatin or devdasi enjoys all rights and privileges patriarchy reserves for men. When they feel free like that, who are we to tell them they are wrong?" What needs urgent addressing, according to her, is the exploitative paradigm. "The women should get to live their lives on their terms without someone else making money off them."

Ratna, Kaveri and Renuka would like that...

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **YOGESH PAWAR**

A senior journalist and opinion leader with 22 years of collective experience with print, web magazine and TV journalism, Yogesh Pawar has worked for several leading media organisations like The Indian Express, rediff.com, and NDTV. He is currently the Deputy News Editor with the Mumbai edition of DNA. Received LMAAGS 2015-16 – Best Feature

## WITCH HUNTING: A SOCIAL MENACE

*The Assam Tribune, December 15, 2014*

**W**itch hunting is a social menace in many societies. And India is no exception. India often equated with a mystical land of charms and superstitions has also witnessed this phenomenon whereby mainly women have been targeted. Centuries of profound histories has given this land endless fables rising from every nook and corner. In places where superstitions and vigilantism overlap and small rumors can turn deadly, nearly 2100 people have been killed on accusation of witchcraft between 2000 and 2012 according to the newspaper Mint. If one tries to understand this phenomenon, it has to be seen as something beyond mere superstition. It is often a systematic gender and class discrimination. Those accused of sorcery often come from similar backgrounds: female, poor and of a low caste. The veil of superstition is often used to hide the real motive. The real causes happen to be to grab her land, settle family scores, family rivalry or to punish her for spurning the sexual advances of some powerful men. It tends to send across a message to women—docility and domesticity is fine, anything else like women not conforming will get punished.

Studies and observations by activists point out that such killings are more often perpetrated by men on women whom they identify as ‘rebels’: women who either ask for or refuse to give up their rights. According to Prabha Jaiswal of Free Legal Committee, in many cases a woman who inherits land from her deceased husband is asked to disown the land. If she denies, then she is branded as a witch and then systematically denied any kinds of rights over that land. She may even be accused of causing the death of her husband.

Witch hunting is like an infectious disease and is constantly spreading to newer areas. As a practice it is common in central and eastern region. Such practices are common in areas which are economically backward and there is little or no access to education and healthcare. In such atmosphere people tend to develop very strong belief in superstition. They explain their misery with half baked ideas of superstition. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, conservative statistics would put the figure of witch hunting related murders at 175 in the year 2008 alone. There are as many as 12 states which can be called hotbeds of witch hunt.

The reasons as mentioned above are never only superstition. It is often a systematic targeting of women. Ojhas are more often than not bribed to name a particular woman a witch. It seems calling a woman a witch is the easiest way to break her. Few case studies prove it. Lata Sahu, a Dalit

woman in Raipur, Madhya Pradesh, contested the polls against the wishes of landowning castes. She was condemned as a witch, stripped and beaten. In another instance, Subhadra in Goalpara district of Assam, challenged the obscurantist practices of the local ojhas. She also dared to ask for a share in her father's property. Her brothers and the local ojha came together to declare her a witch and teach her a lesson.

From ancient times Assam, a north eastern state in India, has been referred to as 'a land of magic and sorcery'. Belief in evil spirits, magic, taboos and other supernatural elements continue to be widespread, particularly among the indigenous communities. Most indigenous communities are tribals. Two of the communities among whom the practice of witchcraft and witch-hunting has been most widely prevalent are the Bodos and the Adivasis. The Bodo community, which is a big plains tribe in the State, continues to be effected by belief in witchcraft and suffers from the menace of witch hunting. Witches are called 'dayna' by Bodos.

In village communities, witchcraft often functioned essentially as a theory of causation. When something went wrong, people tried to accuse someone of witchcraft. Once such an accusation is made, there is a possibility that the person can be relieved of his difficulty. Witches are often women but there are cases of accusing men of witchcraft as well. It is also believed that as witchcraft is difficult to detect. Such acts can only be divulged through divination. The person to be able to identify a witch has to have certain special powers. The Bodos believe that ojhas who also engage in the work of healing communicate with spirits in their sleep and can hence identify a witch.

In the traditional administrative set up of villages, while there are no laws for prosecution of women believed to be witches, village elders gather to decide. But in such meetings nobody takes side of the woman believed to be a witch. They often run the risk of being clubbed as a witch's accomplice and killed. In such one sided trials, the punishment meted out can often be as extreme as killing. This practice, though is not legally sanctioned, enjoys the sanction of a patriarchal village society. If not killed, in the name of curing witches they are subjected to degrading activities like being paraded naked in the village or forced to consume their own excreta. A public spectacle is made of such punishment.

The practice of witchcraft is often dismissed as a tribal rusticity and yokel behavior. But the increasing cases of women being denounced as witches and sentenced to gory deaths point to a fact that it is no longer a tribal practice. Assertion by women in matters of political representation, gender equality and property rights is resulting in "witch hunts" where the victims



are often women of the weaker sections. Very often land is at the centre of such disputes. The insecurity in the matter of land rights in general and the increasing political participation and assertion by women have encouraged the vested interests to brand women as witches. Brinda Karat, a Communist Party leader, points out that the only women active in politics among the tribal people are those aligned with the left movement. And people instead of calling them Communists, call them witches.

While no religion categorically promotes activities like witch hunting, all religions being inherently patriarchal could easily co-opt anti women practices like witch hunting. It is most likely that cases of witch-killing and persecution of women will continue as long as economic inequities and neglect of the health care infrastructure continue. The reluctance on the part of both the community and the law-enforcers to see the killings of these hapless women as blatant murder points to collusion among various elements to keep women at the lowest rung of society. To see it merely as a tribal custom would be to ignore the various influences on tribal life, including the political one, where the constitutional right of political participation has the potential to bring women into public life. No community is completely isolated at present. Rather their superstitious practices have actually been co-opted to serve the larger purpose of curbing women's empowerment. If such collusion of patriarchy and religion continues, revivalism of archaic practices and resistance to progressive development are but inevitable fallouts.



**PARVIN SULTANA**

Parvin Sultana is currently working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science in Pramathesh Barua College, Gauripur. She writes for a number of Assamese and English newspapers and webzines. Her research interest includes gender, minority rights, northeast studies etc. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Jury Appreciation Certificate

## NEWS REPORTS ON WITCH HUNTING

*The Assam Tribune*

*Below are a series of news reports on witch hunting in Assam*

### GOVT INACTION TO TACKLE WITCH-HUNTING FLAYED

**November 28, 2014**

**E**xpressing serious concerns at the increasing incidents of superstition in the name of 'witch-hunting', voluntary social organisation Brothers have held the government responsible for not giving proper attention to this issue despite the fact that it has reached alarming proportions in far-flung pockets of the State. Bringing reference to the recent cases of witch hunting that were widely reported in the media, the secretary general of Brothers, Dibyajyoti Saikia said that the State apparatus was not mobilised in most of those cases, thus missing a chance of giving a strong message to those who resort to such acts of violence in the name of witch hunting.

"In past two months, 15 to 20 such cases of 'witch hunting' have been reported in the State. Most recently, a 60-year old woman Lalita Tanti of Dhekiajuli was declared a 'witch' in a public meeting and was asked to leave the village. The woman was threatened for life, if she did not comply with the command of the villagers," said Saikia, who visited the place and organised an awareness meeting on Thursday.

Some of the key factors that trigger such incidents include lack of awareness about the health and property disputes. "In the incident of Lalita Tanti, her husband's brother accused her of practising witchcraft, following a property dispute nearly two years back. What fuelled the incident was the death of a one-and-a-half month old boy, who was not keeping well and was brought to Lalita for massage. A day before the child's death, a doctor in Dhekiajuli referred him to Tezpur, but his family members brought him back to the village instead," added Saikia.

Asserting that lack of awareness about healthcare is the major reason behind



such incidents, he said that after a proper awareness meeting in the presence of NGOs operating in the area, police and district administration, the villagers have agreed to bring her back to the village. "The Health and Social Welfare Department of the State government have a major role to play in this regard. The proposed-anti-superstition law must also include strict laws against those who fuel superstitious beliefs and also take the opinions and suggestions of the NGOs working in this field into consideration," added Saikia.

### **WOMAN ACCUSED OF PRACTISING WITCHCRAFT ATTACKED**

**November 30, 2014**

Life has changed its course for the worst within a week for Lalita Tanti of Dhekiajuli, who is lying in a bed at the Guwahati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) with severe multiple injuries after being with a machete by a family member on accusations of practising 'witchcraft.'

Ironically, the incident happened a day after the police had rescued and reinstated Lalita to her village, who was made to leave the village following a public meeting on November 25 that decided to 'punish' her for practising witchcraft.

A resident of no. 1 Pirakata of Dhekiajuli, Lalita Tanti was attacked on Friday night by her brother-in-law Maheswar Tanti, who had earlier also tried to malign her image as a 'witch' among the villagers. The assailant entered her house when the two policemen deputed for her security and her husband, were not around. "I was cooking in my kitchen, when he (Maheswar) entered the house and started attacking me with a machete saying that he did not have children due to my witchcraft and that I was now after his property. It is due to his incitation that the villagers started accusing me of casting spells and I was called in for several public meetings so that could decide on my punishment," a frail Lalita told The Assam Tribune.

"I worship lord Shiva and keep dreadlocks. But since the past two years, the villagers have been accusing me of practising witchcraft. Things deteriorated for the worse with the death of an ailing infant, who was not taken to the doctor on time," she added.

Superintendent of Police, Sonitpur, Sanjukta Parashar however, told this correspondent that it was the victim's own decision to go back to the village, despite resistance by the police. Incidentally, on November 27, social organization Brothers organized an awareness meeting in the village in the presence of the circle officer and OC of Dhekiajuli police station, where the villagers were asked not to believe such superstitions. "We have been

following this incident since November 25 and were successful in making them understand our point after which they accepted Lalita back to the village. Unfortunately, due to a personal grudge and property dispute, her family member attacked her,” said Dibyajyoti Saikia of Brothers. The organization has been taking care of Lalita in the GMCH by providing her with medicines and other necessary support.

### **GOVT APATHY DELAYS ANTI-SUPERSTITION BILL**

**July 23, 2015**

As another gruesome incident of witch-hunting rocked Sonitpur district recently, the much anticipated anti-superstition Bill, entangled in government formalities, does not seem to be inching forward. The wait for an Act against superstitions in Assam may get prolonged due to the Government’s alleged apathy and the lack of timely intervention by the departments concerned.

Social activist Dibyajyoti Saikia, who has been engaged in campaigning against malpractices like witch-hunting and related violence, said that if the draft of the Anti-Superstition Bill is not sent to the Assembly before August 1, the Bill would not be placed on the floor of the House in the next Assembly session starting from August 10.

Saikia, who is camping at Bhimajuli in Biswanath Chariali, where a 60-year old woman was beheaded by a mob on the allegation of practising ‘black magic,’ said the State cannot afford ignoring such incidents any further.

The supporters of the Anti-Superstition Law are pinning their hope on its early enactment to control superstition-related violence in the State, the major one being witch-hunting.

“Though the draft of the Bill has been prepared, it is yet to be sent to the Assembly. Lack of swift action by the government departments concerned may result in another setback to the proposed Act,” said Saikia, secretary general of the voluntary organisation, Brothers, which has been leading a campaign in favour of a strict anti-superstition law in the State. It may be noted that States like Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand and Maharashtra have already enacted anti-witch hunting legislations.

“Apart from bringing untold suffering to the affected people, such incidents malign the image of the State to a great extent. Since 2001, more than 300 people have been affected by superstition-related violence in the State. More than 180 people have been killed brutally in the name of witch-hunting. Unfortunately, in several such incidents, the assailants take

advantage of the illiteracy and ignorance prevalent in the backward areas to settle personal scores,” added Saikia.

Following the intervention of the Gauhati High Court and pressure from several social organisations, the Government of Assam prepared the draft of the Bill that was submitted to the court early this year.

“We have been demanding an anti-superstition law in the State since 2011. In the subsequent years, the State Government was pressurized to bring a Bill in the Assembly. The Bill could not come up during the Budget Session of the Assembly this year due to the Government’s apathy despite the fact that the Chief Minister himself had assured us about introducing the law,” Saikia said.

Meanwhile, more cases of witch-hunting were reported from different parts of the State. On July 1, a 48-year-old woman, Kave Rahangpi, was killed at Baithalangso in Karbi Anglong.

“The State’s Education and Health departments are also to blame for such incidents as the lack of proper awareness about medical treatment leads to such superstitious beliefs. Students must be taught about superstitious beliefs prevalent in the society so that the next generation develops a rational and scientific temperament,” the activist added. The anti-superstition draft Bill, prepared by the Assam Government, proposes punishment from three years to life imprisonment. Apart from stricter punishment for terming someone a ‘witch’ and inflicting physical, sexual or mental torture leading to suicide and displacement, the Prevention of and Protection from Witch Hunting Bill, 2015, Assam, aims to check illegal practices by quacks. It also proposes action against negligence in investigation, formation of special courts for trial of witch-hunting cases and free legal aid to victims.

“The provision for life imprisonment in witch-hunting cases is the strictest so far,” Baibhab Anand, a lawyer associated with the New Delhi-based Human Rights Defence International, said. The rights group has been lobbying for a national law to check witch-hunting as at least 12 States have the problem.

The Assam Home Department submitted the draft Bill to the Gauhati High Court on Monday following the court’s instruction during the hearing of a PIL. Rajeeb Kalita, a city-based lawyer, had filed the PIL in 2013, seeking an anti-superstition law since over 130 people have died in such attacks in at least 17 of the State’s 27 districts since 2002.

The PIL said superstition leads many to believe that “evil spells” cast on them by others is the cause for illness, death or financial loss.

## **WITCH HUNTING: SIXTEEN SENT TO JUDICIAL CUSTODY**

**July 26, 2015**

The State government today said that police have so far arrested 16 persons involved in the killing of Purnima Orang, and all of them have been sent to judicial custody.

Orang, an inhabitant of No 1 Bhimajuli village under Biswanath Chariali PS, was killed by a group of people, who branded her a witch, on July 20, 2015. An official statement reiterated the State government's stand on introducing a strong legislation to curb this menace. The statement added that the Bill in this regard is proposed to be introduced in the summer session of the State Legislative Assembly.

It further said that all OCs and ICs of police stations and outposts of Sonitpur district have been instructed to take precautionary measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents. They have also been directed to organise meetings among different tribes and communities for spreading awareness against witch hunting.



### **MAMATA MISHRA**

With more than 10 years of experience in daily reporting, Mamata at present is a Staff Reporter with The Assam Tribune, a leading English daily of Northeastern India. Her writings cover a number of issues : disability, women's and children's issues, social and civic concern to name a few. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best News Report.

## IT WAS A PART OF ME... PART OF MY WOMANHOOD...

*www.sahiyo.com , January 23, 2016*



I have very few memories of my childhood, but one memory in particular stands out and haunts me to this day. Unfortunately, it's a vivid, painful memory and fills me with anger when I recall it.

I was five years old when my mother and aunt took my cousin and me on an "excursion". I remember sitting in a car and approaching an unfamiliar block of apartments. I was confused; I didn't know where I was and what I was doing there. Despite my seemingly endless young imagination, I could never have anticipated what happened to me next.

I walked into a small apartment with a cramped living room at the end of a very short corridor. There was a dampness in the air and a slight smell from the poor ventilation. I approached the living room and sat on the floor. It was a warm day and I watched the net curtains of the large window slowly move with the breeze. I had been greeted by an old lady, whose face I can't remember. I didn't recognise her and was confused as to why I was currently in her apartment. I watched as she walked out of the room. I peered inquisitively into the kitchen and caught a glimpse of her heating a knife on the stove. I was always told to stay away from sharp knives at that age. Knives were dangerous. I could hurt myself. I remember the open flame on the stove and seeing the silver of the metal and the black handle of the knife while I watched her quickly hold it over the naked flame. She approached the living room with the knife in her hand, trying to conceal it behind her. She approached me.

My mother asked me to remove my underwear. I remember saying no; I didn't want a strange woman to see me without my underwear on. My mother assured me it would be okay; I trusted her and did as she asked. The old lady told me that she wanted to check something in my private area and asked me to open my legs. I was so young that I wasn't scared at that time. I was confused, but not scared. I was innocently oblivious to how invasive and inappropriate this situation was and so I obediently did as I was told.

I remember a sharp pain. An agonising pain. A pain that I can still vividly remember today. So intense that I still have a lump in my throat when I recall

that moment. I instantly started sobbing, from pain, shock, confusion and fear. My next memory is that of blood. More blood than I had ever seen, suddenly gushing out from my most intimate area. I still didn't comprehend what had just happened to me. I had believed that aunty when she had told me that she was checking something. I was young and naive enough to believe that people don't lie and this was my first encounter when I realised that, unfortunately, the world doesn't work like that. In so many ways I was stripped of many things on that day. My rosy outlook on life, my childhood innocence, my right to dictate what happens to my body and my faith in my mother not harming me. I continued to cry, the pain was excruciating and the sight of the blood traumatised me. I was given a sweet and comforted by my mother. The events after that are still hazy and my next clear memory is that of being back in the car and staring through teary eyes at the apartment building disappear as we drove away.

Over the years I repressed this memory. There was no need to recall it. It was never spoken about and I still remained unaware of what transpired that day. A decade later, I was amongst some of my female friends. The topic of Female Genital Mutilation came up, or as I was to discover that day, "khatna", a Bohra ritual performed on young girls. Hearing their recollections of what had happened to them, I finally realised that this is what had happened to me that day.

I was mutilated.

Thankfully for me, I had a lucky escape. The unskilled, uneducated woman who barbarically cut me did not cause me too much physical damage. Emotionally and mentally, there are many repercussions. I have a deep phobia of blood and a simmering resentment that my mother chose for this to happen to me. Although my mother believed that she was acting in my best interest, I struggle to come to terms with the fact that I was so barbarically violated.

It may have been just a pinch of skin, but it was a part of me, a part of my femininity and a part of my womanhood.



#### **MARIYA ALI**

Mariya Ali is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Psychology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is passionate about ending FGC, and has been involved in various initiatives over the years to raise awareness and end the practice. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Blog



## THE CUT AND THE HURT

*The Week*, November 9, 2014

*Mama tied a blindfold over my eyes. The next thing I felt was my flesh being cut away. I heard the blade sawing back and forth through my skin.*

**Waris Dirie, in *Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad***

**A**refa Johari, 28, from Grant Road, Mumbai, has not read Dirie's autobiography. Yet she can relate to what the Somali supermodel and actor would have gone through when she was cut. Johari, too, was circumcised by a midwife with a razor blade at the age of seven. "I was not given anaesthesia," she says. "My mother ensured that only a bit on the tip of my clitoris was cut. Still, it was painful." She was upset with her mother but eventually forgave her. "She got it done on me thinking it was beneficial for me and necessary as per our tradition," says Johari, a journalist with scroll.in.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) or female circumcision, according to the World Health Organization, includes procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. A recent UNICEF report states that more than 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM in 29 countries where the practice is prevalent. As many as 30 million girls are at risk of being cut before their 15th birthday if the current trend continues. Most survivors are from African countries, but FGM is also practised in India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and some countries in the Middle East.

FGM involves four procedures. What is practised in India is type 1, which involves partial or total removal of the clitoris or the prepuce. The other types of FGM include partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora; narrowing of the vaginal opening; and other procedures like pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the genital area.

FGM, which has been outlawed in many countries as a serious violation of human rights, is still prevalent among the Dawoodi Bohra community in India. An educated and affluent group of people, Dawoodi Bohras are a sub-sect of Ismaili Shias. India has a rough estimate of 5 lakh Bohras-around half of the 10 lakh-strong Bohra community in the world-spread across Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Around 90 per cent of Bohri women still undergo the archaic



expatriate Bohras, settled in developed countries, who get their daughters to fly back to India to undergo genital cutting," she says. "They do have an understanding that something is not right about it and that it is increasingly coming under the illegal arena."

The girl is taken for khatna under the pretext of buying an ice cream or going to a birthday party. Dr Farida Calcuttawala still remembers how her aunt dressed her up the day she was circumcised. "I thought something nice was going to happen. I was told that we were going out," she says. She was taken to a house, which looked unhygienic, in a crowded Bohri locality and was given something to eat. An old, fat Bohri woman cut her. "Then people suddenly pulled me down. Whatever they had to do, they did it. It was horrible," she says. Usually, it is the mother who takes the girl for khatna. But Calcuttawala's grandmother went with her, as her mother couldn't see her go through it. "My dadima was an illiterate but strong-willed person. She would control all these things. My mom didn't have a say in it," she says.

At a clinic on a narrow street near Bhandi Bazaar in Mumbai, we met a midwife who does genital cutting. Fragile and pale, she didn't really appear to be a 'cutter'. "She does it at her home and in the clinic," says the Bohri woman who accompanied us. The midwife was tight-lipped about what went on in the clinic, as she had been forbidden to speak about it by the doctor and the religious heads.

On further investigations, THE WEEK found that genital cutting is also done in premier multispeciality hospitals in metro cities. We got in touch with a gynaecologist in a Bohri-run multispeciality hospital in Mumbai, posing as relatives of a Hindu woman who was forced by her Bohri mother-in-law to undergo FGM. A woman married to a Bohri is expected to undergo circumcision in order to be considered a Bohri. "There won't be blood loss or pain. Only a pinch of the clitoris is removed, that, too, under anaesthesia. The person has to be in the hospital for 4-6 hours only," says the gynaecologist.

The procedure costs ₹15,000. When I tell the gynaecologist that my friend cannot afford it, she brings it down by ₹10,000. "The anaesthetist needs to be paid. Then there are hospital charges. Also, we use better quality suture so that one doesn't feel any discomfort after the procedure," she says. Cutting is done in the hospital on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Khatna can be performed only after a sanction from the religious head. "A list is given out; you are supposed to go to those doctors only," says Aiman Kanchwala, 30, who got cut at the age of seven. "I don't know how the network operates or how the list is circulated. It is a well-guarded information."

Rukaiya Master, 17, from Sunel, a small town in Jhalawar district in Rajasthan, says that every Bohri girl should undergo khatna, as it is a religious practice. She underwent it when she was seven. Islamic scholars, however, say that there is no mention of any type of genital mutilation in the Quran. "Religion has nothing to do with it," says Dr Zeenat Shaukat Ali, professor of Islamic Studies, St Xavier's College, Mumbai, and director of The Wisdom Foundation. "These are customary practices of certain traditional societies in some parts of Africa, where all women were genitally mutilated irrespective of their religion, caste or creed. Among them, there were Muslims, too." They continued to follow it even after migrating to other countries. Bohris started practising it as they got converted to Islam. The objective of the practice, says Ali, is to subdue women emotionally and sexually. "I think when you are part of a community, you need to follow certain practices," says Tasneem, who runs a small boutique in Viramgam, Gujarat. Tasneem has three daughters. The elder ones, who are now 14 and 10, underwent khatna. The younger one, at a year and a half, is too young for it.

Unlike male circumcision, khatna is a hush-hush affair. Bohris don't talk about it. Some of the men in the community don't even know that this practice exists. "My husband came to know of it only after marriage. He was very upset," says Calcuttawala. "I just hate that this thing happened to me. It is an absolute criminal act, which leaves a girl scarred for the rest of her life. It is akin to someone cutting off your toe for no reason. How dare they cut off a part of my body without my permission? Would you be OK with that?" Johari says some of the people she knew had to go for therapy post marriage. "They were not able to interact with their partners and the very thought of someone touching them there scared them," she says.

At the crowded Bhendi Bazaar in Mumbai, it is easy to identify Bohri women, thanks to their colourful ridas. But there is no consensus among them on whether to continue the practice. Most older women do not question the practice; for them, it lies in the zone of unquestioning belief. Some are for the practice and ensure that even their maid's daughters get it done; others don't believe in the practice but lack courage to speak against it. There are mothers who haven't got it done on their daughters, but lie about it for the fear of being ostracised.

Those who choose not to comply with the patriarchal directives have strong reasons to do so. Genital cutting can have several health implications. Eight-year-old Insia was taken to some dingy place and cut a few years ago. Her grandmother told her that she ate too many berries and thus had some growth to be removed. She could not walk for days.

“There are girls who have gone through years of menstrual discomfort,” says a Bohri woman.

“Complications can be immediate such as shock, bleeding and infection,” says Dr Kamini Rao, gynaecologist and medical director, Milann, The Fertility Center, Bengaluru. “These can sometimes lead to death.” It can also lead to sexual dysfunction, infertility, urinary problems, vaginal tears during coitus and delivery, resulting in bleeding. “At times, bleeding can be profuse, leading to morbidity and mortality,” says Dr Laila Dave, senior consultant and obstetrician, Nova Specialty Hospitals, Mumbai. Some studies indicate that women who have undergone FGM are more likely to die during childbirth. They also have a higher risk of delivering stillborn children.

FGM victims often complain that they don’t feel attracted to men the way their peers do. “We don’t experience the same pleasure that a normal woman would during sex. The constant burning after sex does not allow me to enjoy it as a normal woman would. You cannot masturbate as your clitoris becomes extremely sensitive,” says Zainab from Mumbai, who is a marketing manager in Dubai. She says it is hard to accept that any community can go to the extent of curbing a female’s sexual desire and keeping it in control. “It is difficult to get over the fact that women in your family, who have undergone and dealt with similar situations in the past, are still willing to put their children through it, and that too well-educated women,” she says.

Johari is worried about how much effect khatna will have on her sexual life. Calcuttawala says it would have been easier for her to reach orgasm if she had not undergone khatna. “Clitoris stimulation is what makes a woman sexually excited. Khatna limits you,” says Calcuttawala, who realised how severe the impact of genital cutting can be on one’s sexual life while studying human anatomy as part of her MBBS course.

Dr Prakash Kothari, sexologist and founder-adviser to the World Association for Sexology, partly agrees with Calcuttawala. “In females, clitoris is the most reliable orgasm trigger. Most of them require additional stimulation of the clitoris to have orgasm,” he says. Kothari has examined a few FGM cases from Africa, based on which he suggests that the sexual problems FGM victims complain of could be due to psychological trauma. “It was total genital mutilation. But their desire level and orgasmic capacity were not hampered at all. The arousal sensations were very much there,” he says. “Female sexuality is dependent on the hormones produced by the ovaries, which are deep inside. Whatever you do externally will not have an impact

on your desire level. I haven't come across any particular sexual dysfunction in FGM survivors."

In 1991, Kothari met Hanny Lightfoot Klein, who has done several studies on genital mutilation, at an international conference on orgasm. Klein had interviewed girls and women in Africa and Sudan who had undergone total genital mutilation. They had not only the clitoris but also the external vulva chopped. But their sexual responses were intact. Kothari also clarifies that if FGM is done with the purpose of subduing women's sexual urges, it is futile. "As a medical expert, I would say it is of no help. If at all, it will only cause harm."

The Bohra community is witnessing a silent movement against khatna. Calcuttawala has started influencing her friends against getting khatna done on their daughters. She has decided that she will never get it done on her child. "I will kill the person who suggests it be done on my daughter or any other child," she says. Zainab says that mothers should now take a stand against khatna. Around 15 years ago, Johari's mother, Sophie, 56, read an article by an FGM survivor. It was an eye-opener for her. "By then, I had it done on my daughters. I told myself to let go of it," she says. Sophie says that as far as her granddaughters are concerned, she will give the liberty to her daughters.

A Bohri activist, who goes by the name Tasleem, launched an online petition in 2011 seeking to put an end to khatna. Tasleem, who says she did not undergo khatna, forwarded her petition to the then Bohra high priest Dr Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin. But she didn't get any response. The petition, however, sparked off heated discussions on social networking sites. "This brutal practice has no place in a civilised world. It is not even an Islamic ritual. It is just a barbaric African misogynist ritual that found its way into a fairly progressive community," writes Tasleem, in an email to THE WEEK.

Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan says there is a need to review genital cutting in the light of scientific thinking. "I would personally consider it as absolutely inhuman and unscientific," he says. "Human beings are a creation of God. We should abide by nature. Whatever sensitivities we have are a part of our self. To play with or to destroy them is not justified." Johari knows that a legal clampdown may not help much to put an end to genital mutilation. For instance, FGM is still prevalent in the UK where it was banned in 1983. Children are still being cut every summer—the 'cutting season'. Johari says that awareness is essential to eliminate genital cutting. For the past couple of years, she has been talking to people on a personal level. A few weeks ago, she, along with some like-minded people, formed a small informal group. "Not all of us are circumcised. We talk to as many Bohris as possible in an informal manner.

We are taking a subtle approach because we don't want the community to feel targeted or threatened. In fact, we don't want to offend anybody," she says.

The group, which has not been named yet, has also been trying to get an official opinion about the practice from the religious heads so that something more could be understood about it. "If the community leaders say, 'let us not follow this practice,' it will stop overnight," says Johari. Until then, she will speak for the little ones who are unaware of what is being taken away from them.

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **MINI THOMAS**

With over two decades of experience in journalism, both print and TV, Mini Thomas is at present a Senior Correspondent at The Week, Bengaluru. Her areas of interest are public health, human rights violation and gender justice. She has won several prestigious awards both National and International. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Investigative Story

## BREAKING THE SILENCE CAMPAIGN

*A digital action and on-ground outreach program to change behaviors around menstrual hygiene*

**B**reaking myths and taboos around menstruation has been Urmila Chanam's mission. Five years ago, she set out on a campaign "Breaking The Silence" travelling from village to village to break menstruation stigma, myths, and taboos to empower young women with information about their bodies.

Using the social media platform - twitter, Facebook and YouTube -Urmila has galvanised action and changed public perceptions regarding the 'red droplets'. Her first Digital Action Campaign was spread across 10 States.

The 'Breaking the Silence' Campaign has raised awareness about menstruation through web based information dissemination, setting up a hotline, and organizing quizzes to engage both women and men with the issue. Urmila also started the 'My Pad Campaign' and mobilized the donation of 10,000 sanitary pads in just one month to be distributed to girls and women in need. Inspired by the achievements so far, Urmila has set her sights on ending menstruation stigma in India for good.

While her 'Breaking the Silence' campaign uses social media to spread the word, on the ground she reaches out through school and community based trainings to spread accurate information on menstruation, its hygienic management and creation of a support system for girls and women so that periods do not interrupt school, work and aspirations.





So far, she has trained 6,000 girls across nine States to understand that their periods need not disempower them since it is just their biology. In most places she visits, apart from strongly counselling women against using harmful things to manage their periods, Urmila tells them how to clean and reuse cloth if they cannot afford sanitary napkins.

Urmila travels to different regions, partnering with local stakeholders to ensure that there is always someone in the state who is trained to continue creating impact. Most of the stakeholders are civil society organizations with established outreach mechanisms and a strong reputation in local communities. Urmila is also exploring some less conventional partnerships-approaching individuals in leadership positions, recruiting a popular rock band AJ as a brand ambassador, and even working with regiments in the Indian army.



#### **URMILA CHANAM**

Urmila Chanam, a journalist/columnist hailing from the north-east state of Manipur, is a public health expert and Founder of 'Breaking the Silence' Campaign which is a combination of a digital action campaign and on-ground outreach program to end myths, taboos and stigma around menstruation. She is also the Ambassador of World Pulse, the largest social network of women leaders connecting 190 countries. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best Social Media Campaign

## AS UK TENNIS PLAYER BREAKS SILENCE ON MENSTRUATION, INDIAN SPORTSWOMEN SPEAK OUT ON TABOO SUBJECT

*www.scroll.in, February 7, 2015*

*In India, girls almost never talk to their coaches about period problems.*



**B**ritish tennis player Heather Watson crashed out in the very first round of the Australian Open last month. In an interview after the match, while discussing her admittedly poor performance, she spoke about feeling dizzy and nauseous on the court and took the sporting world by surprise: “I think it’s just one of these things that I have, girl things. It just happens.”

Watson’s reference to “girl things” broke an unofficial code almost no sportswoman had breached before – talking about menstruation in public. Since then, several athletes have opened up about it in British media, debating how much periods affect performance. Some spoke of taking contraceptive pills to delay menstrual cycles for important match days. Some discussed the pain and cramps that slowed them down. Even former tennis champion Martina Navratilova spoke up: “It sounds like an excuse but for women it is a reality... You don’t want to use it as an excuse but it can affect some players in a big way.” If period talk has been a taboo in England, it is even more so in India.

In a country where menstrual blood is widely considered impure and inauspicious and barely 12% of women have access to sanitary napkins, how do sportswomen in physically demanding sports deal with menstruation and its taboos? How much do periods impact their games?

### **'I LOST COMPETITIONS'**

Anju Bobby George, India's long jump champion from Kerala, won three golds, two silvers and two bronzes at major international competitions between 2002 and 2007. And she is convinced she could have added two more medals to her kitty if it had not been for menstruation.

"I lost two big long jump competitions because of it, but could never tell anyone that," said George in a phone interview with Scroll.in.



At the 2002 Indo-World Championships, George got her period just before her event and suffered from cramps and weakness. She ended up finishing seventh. The same thing happened at the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games, when George finished fourth, just 2 centimetres short of getting a medal. "I was in top form in every other way, but the period made me feel weaker and there was nothing I could do about it," said George. "After the events, many people criticised my performance but this is not something I could ever tell them."

Menstrual cramps, pain and weakness do not affect all women in the same way, and several sportswomen are not particularly hampered by their periods. For the many who do have a tough time at the start of their menstrual cycles, the bigger challenge is often dealing with male coaches in a culture where the 'P' word is not uttered openly.

### **'I FIRED A COACH'**

In India, young girls training in sports academies almost never talk to their coaches about period problems, says retired marathon champion Sunita Godara. Coaches often tend to be men, so if trainees suffer from severe menstrual pain, they typically convey it by saying, "Sir, aaj tabiyet theek nahi hai" (I am not feeling well today).

"Coaches are usually understanding enough and give the girls lighter training on those days, but some coaches just don't get it – they are either ignorant or not gender sensitive," said Godara, an Arjuna awardee who was the first Indian to win a world-class marathon in 1990. "Such coaches insist on heavy workouts, which are not advised on the first two days of one's period."

In contrast, the British hockey team is expected to email period dates to their coach every month so that training schedules can be adjusted accordingly. Godara now runs the HFT Taekwondo Academy in Delhi, where she took the extreme measure of firing a coach two months ago because of this reason.

"I had been receiving several complaints from girls that the coach did not understand what they meant by feeling 'unwell,'" said Godara. "He would force them to train rigorously even on those days, so I eventually expelled him."

Godara's case is a baffling example of the severe silence around menstruation: she admits that none of the taekwondo students directly told the coach about their periods and, ironically, the coach was never told the real reason for losing his job.

"I also gave him some other reason for expelling him," she said. "Openly talking about periods is definitely a taboo."

#### **'I WOULD WEAR EXTRA PADS'**

Sportswomen, who are used to intense physical training, don't really see period problems as an impediment or an excuse for poor performance, but they do believe it is important to have a sensitive coach.

"We work hard and are used to a lot of pain during training and competition, so I definitely think we can handle having to deal with having a period...I think it's the equation you share with your coaches," said squash champion Joshana Chinappa. She tells her coach if she feels weak during a period only on rare occasions, if she thinks it affects her performance during training. "In a match you just have to deal with it."

Taking contraceptive pills to delay periods before important tournaments is not a common practice in India, with most sportswomen wary about the side effects. "Such pills can affect both performance and health," said Anju Bobby George.

Mountaineer Santosh Yadav, who became the first woman to conquer Mount Everest twice (in 1992 and 1993), found menstruation challenging not because it can be physically draining but because of logistics.

"I have often been the only woman in the team on mountain expeditions, where we would have no toilets for days," said Yadav, who still made sure her colleagues never found out if she was on her period. "I would often wear extra [sanitary pads] at the same time so that I could climb long hours without staining."

## 'WE NEED EDUCATION'

Awareness about menstruation is low across India, and several young women enter sports without adequate knowledge about its physiology, says Godara.

On the first day of one's period, she says, the body is usually heavy, a time when athletes should ideally stick to light exercises. By the end of the second day, the body starts to get lighter, and on the third day, trainees can resume regular workouts.

"I try to advise my students about this, but it is the duty of sports institutes and doctors to educate young women," said Godara.

Coaches, too, need the same education. "Many coaches don't understand that periods affect different women in different ways," said Vandana Rao, a former athlete and Arjuna award winner who always suffered from severe menstrual cramps and had to take medication to be able to compete in the 1986 Asian Games. "Luckily I had a very considerate coach and I did well in the tournament, but many coaches need to be sensitised."



### AAREFA JOHARI

Aarefa Johari a Mumbai-based journalist and activist began her career as a reporter and features writer at Hindustan Times, covering communities, culture, urban development and gender and is now with Scroll.in. Aarefa is also the co-founder of Sahiyo, a non-profit advocacy organisation working to end the practice of Female Genital Cutting among the Dawoodi Bohras and other Asian communities. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Jury Appreciation Certificate

# GENDER BIAS THAT'S LEAVING GIRLS TO DIE

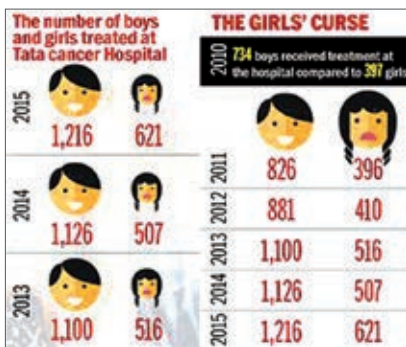
*Mumbai Mirror, March 6, 2016*

*Docs every week encounter moms abandoned by their families for daring to continue daughters' treatment.*

In September last year, a woman from Bihar was abused by her father in front of the medical staff at the Tata Memorial Hospital in Parel, when she pleaded that her four-year-old daughter Munni Yadav's treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (a type of blood cancer) shouldn't be discontinued. She failed to persuade him and the girl was taken back to her village. Three months later, the woman walked out on her husband and in-laws and returned to the hospital with Munni, but the cancer had spread rapidly. Munni died on February 15 this year.

Munni and her mother's struggle is just another example in the larger picture of gender bias in cancer treatment, which is prevalent not only in the rural areas but also in major cities such as Mumbai. Almost every month, the Tata Memorial Hospital sees several women who have been abandoned by their families only because they attempted to get their daughters treated.

The statistics compiled by the hospital's oncology department give a clear indication about gender bias when it comes to cancer treatment. As per these statistics, in 2013, 1,110 boys were administered chemotherapy at the hospital, while the number of girls stood at 516. The following year, 1,126 boys were brought to the hospital compared to 507 girls, and in 2015, the number of boys stood at 1,216 as against 621 girls (see box).



Another major problem is the high rate of treatment refusal and abandonment (TRA) when it comes to girls. The treatment refusal and abandonment rate among boys in 2013 was 3.73% compared to 6.59% among girls. In 2014, the TRA rate was 5.77% among boys compared to a massive 11.24% among girls. Last year was the only exception when the treatment dropout rate in

boys and girls was almost the same (4.9% and 4.51% respectively).

"It is definitely not that the incidences of cancer among boys are higher compared to girls. The less number of girls being brought into the hospital is a direct evidence of gender bias," Dr Shripad Banavali, head of paediatric and medical oncology, said. "Some parents will blatantly say, 'ladki hai, uska ilaaj karke kya fayda', while some will beat



around the bush citing various problems such as shortage of money and lack of accommodation," he added.

Citing an example of an obvious gender bias in treatment, Banavali said, "About four years ago, I met a couple who refused to treat their two-year-old girl suffering from kidney cancer even though the cure rate is as high as 90%. They said that even if she got cured, no-one will marry her as she will be left with only one kidney." The doctor added that retinoblastoma (tumour in the retina) is another cancer where parents often refuse treatment citing no-one will marry their girls because the effected eye has to be removed.

Social workers associated with the Tata Memorial Hospital said that families have been reluctant to get their girls treated even when funds have been arranged. A social worker recalled a case of a 14-year-old girl from Maharashtra's Buldhana district, who was suffering from osteogenic sarcoma, a type of bone cancer, and required surgery. "We got donors to fund the treatment, but her father refused to get the girl treated, and dragged the mother and daughter back home." The girl died on September 19, 2015.

### **MOTHERS FIGHT BACK**

In several cases, it has come to light that the mother has chosen to walk out on her husband to get her daughter treated. One such example is that of Shabana Shaikh, who chose to not return to her marital home in Manchar village near Pune, after her husband Firoze refused to get their four-year-old daughter Sabrin treated for Burkitt's lymphoma, a cancer common among children in Central Africa.

ImPaCCT Foundation, an initiative by the Tata Memorial Hospital that supports treatment of the poor pediatric patients through donors, has been funding Sabrin's treatment entirely, apart from accommodation and nutrition.

"My husband said that Sabrin should be left to die. When I decided to take her to Mumbai, he threw me out of the house along with my other children," said Shabana, who travelled outside her village for the first time along with Sabrin and two sons, aged seven and four. "She is my child, why wouldn't I help her," Shabana said, adding that she had been disowned by her brother as well. "He too did not see any logic in saving a girl. My boys will leave me but I know my daughter will be there for me," she said. Sabrin has been under treatment since May last year and will need another month of chemotherapy.

Shalini Jatia, secretary of ImpaCCT Foundation, said that apart from financial constraints and accommodation, there is a belief that cancers are not curable, and that is one of the main reasons for not commencing treatment. "In cases of gender bias, most parents often cite the first three reasons but there are some cases where the parents blatantly state that they don't want to continue the treatment as their child is a girl," Jatia said, lamenting that when social workers contact the parents to follow up on such cases, they often get angry, don't respond, or change their phone numbers.

### **A SUCCESSFUL FIGHTBACK**

Ten years ago, Shanti Shah walked out on her husband and his family in Kathmandu, Nepal, to give her daughter Sahara a chance to survive. Sahara, then just two years old, had been diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia, a type of blood cancer, but Shanti's in-laws didn't want her to undergo treatment because she was a girl. Shanti admitted Sahara to the Tata Memorial Hospital in Parel, and the completely cured girl and her mother now reside in Ambarnath. Shanti recalled that her in-laws had warned her against returning home.

"The discrimination was obvious from the time Sahara was born. My in-laws were indifferent towards her. At times, there were conversations in the house about how they don't have anyone to take the family legacy forward," Shanti said, adding with pride that Sahara, who has been cancer-free since 2009, loves to dance and aspires to become an actress. "It was like a part of me was unwell. I couldn't see her suffering," Shanti said, adding that her Kuwait-based husband never bothered to check on them.



#### **JYOTI SHELAR**

Jyoti Shelar is a journalist with The Hindu and her primary focus is healthcare. She often writes on communities and related trends. She has over eleven years of experience in reporting. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- News report



## தண்டனை களமாகும் பெண்ணூடல்.

ஏகாதிபத்தியம், மனித உரிமைகள், வல்லரசு என்று ஒங்கி நிற்கும் அமெரிக்காவில் கூட அதிபர் பதவி இது வரை பெண்களுக்கு கிடைத்ததில்லை. ஹிலாரி கிளிண்டன் அதற்கான போட்டியில் ஒவ்வொரு முறையும் பின்னுக்கு தள்ளப்படுகிறார். ஆனால் இந்தியா அப்படி எல்லாம் பார்க்கவில்லை பாலின சமத்துவத்தில் பெண்களை உயர் பதவியில் அமர்த்துகிறது என்று பெருமையை உலக நாடுகள் பேசிக் கொண்டிருக்கின்றன. உண்மையாக பெண்கள் இந்தியாவில் எப்படி வாழ்கிறார்கள்.

பெண்ணாக பிறந்துவிட்டால் மாதந்தோறும் உடலில் ஏற்படுகிற இயற்கை உபாதைகளில் ஒன்றான மாதவிடாய் கூட மதத்தின் பெயரில் சாதியின் பெயரில் தான் ஆணாதிக்கத்தின் கண்ணோட்டத்தோடு அணுகுகிறார்கள்.. மாதவிடாய் வரும் நாட்களில் அந்த பெண்கள் தீண்டகாதவர்கள் என்றும் அந்த நாட்களில் அவர்களை தொடர்பால் தீட்டு என்றும் இந்தியாவின் தலைநகர் முதல் கடைக்கோடி கிராமங்கள் வரை கற்பிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளன.

நாப்கின் மாற்ற வசதியில்லை

நகரப்புறத்தில் எத்தனை பேருந்து நிலையங்களில் கழிப்பறை வசதிகள் இருக்கிறது. வெளியில் செல்லும் பெண்களுக்கு இயற்கை உபாதை கழிப்பதற்கு கழிப்பறைகளே கிடையாது. தொடைகளுக்கு இடையே வழியும் உதிரத்தின் கோரத்தை விட அந்த தருணங்களில் நாப்கின் மாற்ற தவிக்க உம் பெண்கிளன் மனநிலை பொது இடங்களில் கழிப்பறைகள் இல்லாத இந்த தேசம் மீது காரி உமிழ நேரிடும் .

கேரளாவில் நடந்த கொடுமை

கேரளாவில் கொச்சின் மாநகரில் சிறப்பு பொருளாதார மண்டலம் அமைக்கப்பட்டுள்ள இடத்தில் உள்ள அஸ்மாரப்பர் பிரைவேட் லிமிடட் நிறுவனத்தில் பணிபுரிந்த பெண் ஒருவர் கழிப்பறையில் பயன்படுத்திய நாப்கினை வைத்துவிட்டு வர, ஊழியர்கள் அனைவரையும் ஆடையை தூக்கி உள்ளாடையை கழட்டச் சொல்லி பெண் கண்காணிப்பாளர்கள் இருவர் சோதனை நடத்தி இருக்கிறார்கள் ..

இந்த சம்பவம் கேரளா முழுவதும் பெண்களிடையே கடும் கொந்தளிப்பை உருவாக்கியது. பெண்கள் தொடர்ந்து உடல் ரீதியாக துன்புறுத்தலுக்கும், அவமதிப்புக்கும் உள்ளாவதை மனதில் கொண்டு பயன்படுத்திய அல்லது பயன்படுத்தாத நாப்கின்களை சம்மந்தப்பட்ட அஸ்மாரப்பர் நிறுவனத்திற்கு அனுப்புவது என்று ஒரு போராட்டத்தை முற்போக்கு பெண்ணிய சிந்தனையாளர்கள் முன்னெடுத்தார்கள் .

கேரளாவில் சபரிமலை சீசன் மாதங்களில் சபரிமலைக்கு கீழே உள்ள பம்பா நதி வரை செல்லும் கேரள மாநில அரசு பேருந்துகளில் தொடர்ந்து நடுத்தர வயது பெண்களை அவர்கள் சுத்தத்தை காரணம் காண்பித்து ஏற்றிச் செல்ல அனுமதி மறுக்கப்படுகிறது .இந்து மத நம்பிக்கைகள் ,சடங்குகளின் அடிப்படையில் மாதவிடாய் ஏற்படும் பெண்களை தீண்டத்தகாதவர்களாக நடத்துவது. மதத்தின் நம்பிக்கைகளை பிடித்துக் கொண்டு பெண்களை இழிவுபடுத்துவதை இனி ஒரு போதும் அனுமதிக்க முடியாது என்பது ஒட்டுமொத்த பெண்களின் குரலாகவும் கேரளாவில் ஒலித்தது.

பெண் தெய்வங்களுக்கே பெண்கள் கருவறைக்குள் சென்று பூஜை செய்ய அனுமதிப்பதில்லை. கன்னட நடிகை ஜெயமாலா, கடந்த 1987 ஆம் ஆண்டு சபரிமலை கோவில் கருவறைக்குள் நுழைந்து சாமி குத்தம் என்று சட்டப் போராட்டம் நடத்தியதை எல்லாம் எண்ணிப்பார்க்கும் போது தொடர்ந்து இது ஆண்களுக்கான உலகமாக பெண்களின் உடலை வைத்தே பெண்களை அடிமைப்படுத்தும் உலகமாக நமது தேசம் மாறிப் போயிருக்கிறது என்பதை உணர முடிகிறது. அதனால் தான் கடவுளின் தேசம் என்று சொல்லும் கேரளாவில் கடவுளின் பெயரில் பெண்களை இழிவுப்படுத்துவதற்கு எதிராக எதிர்ப்புகள் கிளம்பின.

## இது நியாயமா

பெண்கள் நீண்ட நேரம் நாப்கின் மாற்றாமல் இருப்பதால் கற்பப்பையில் தொற்றுக் கிருமிகள் தாக்கும் அபாயம் உள்ளது .. அது கால போக்கில் கர்ப்பப்பை புற்றுநோயில் கொண்டு போய் பெண்களை விடுவதும் உண்டு.இது குறித்து எல்லாம் என்றாவது மத நம்பிக்கையின் பேரில் இழிவுப்படுத்துபவர்களோ , பெண்களின் உடல் உழைப்பை சுரண்டும் வர்த்தக நிறுவனங்களோ எண்ணிப்பார்த்ததுண்டா ?

கேரள பெண்கள் போராட்டத்தில் தன்னை இணைத்துக் கொண்ட தேசிய ஊடகமான சிஎன் என் ஐபிஎன் நடத்திய *let us talk periods* என்ற பிரச்சார நிகழ்ச்சியின் மூலம் உதிரப்போக்கு குறித்து வெளிப்படையாக திறந்த விவாதமாக முன்னெடுத்தது .

2009 உலக சுகாதார நிறுவனமான *unicef* இந்தியாவில் வயது வந்த உடன் 20 சதவீத வளரிளம் பருவ பெண் பிள்ளைகள் பள்ளிக்கு செல்வதை நிறுத்தி விடுகிறார்கள் என்கிறது.

கர்நாடகாவில் தேவங்கரி மாவட்டத்தில் உள்ள சாத்தூர் என்ற கிராமம்.அங்கு காடு கொள்ளர் பழங்குடியின மக்கள் அதிகளவில் வாழ்கிறார்கள் . காடு கொள்ளர் பழங்குடியின பெண்கள் உதிரப் போக்கு காலக்கட்டங்களில் வீடுகளுக்கு வெளியே காடுகளில் தங்க வைக்கப்படுவார்கள் . இது போன்று வீட்டை விட்டு பழங்குடியின பெண்களை உதிரப் போக்கு நாட்களில் விளக்கி வைக்கும் முறை இங்கு மட்டுமல்ல பெங்களூருக்கு அருகே நாகதேவனஹல்லி என்னும் பகுதியில் உள்ள தோடாகல்லாராஹத்தி என்ற இடத்திலும் இருக்கிறது. வீடுகள் தனியாகவும் வீடுகளுக்கு அருகேயே பிறந்த குழந்தைகளோடு மகப்பேறு அடைந்த பெண் தங்க வைப்பதற்கான கொட்டகையும் அமைக்கப்பட்டிருக்கிறது .

சித்ரதுர்கா ,ஹசான் மாவட்டங்களில் உள்ள பெரும்பாலான பெண்கள் குழந்தை பிறந்தவுடன் இந்த சமூக விலக்கு கொடுமை தாங்க முடியாமல் கர்ப்பப்பை நீக்குவதற்கான அறுவை சிகிச்சை செய்துக் கொள்கிறார்கள். ஒரு சமூகத்தில் உள்ள ஒரு பழக்கமானது தனது உறுப்பையே அறுத்தெரிந்து விட்டு வந்தால் தான் பெண்ணாக ,சுகமனுஷியாக அனுமதிக்கும் என்றால் இதை விட பண்பாட்டு பயங்கரவாதத்தின் உச்சம் வேறு என்ன இருக்க முடியும் .

இது போன்ற பண்பாட்டினைக் கொண்ட காடு கொள்ளர் பழங்குடியினத்தவர்கள் 15 லட்சம் பேர் கர்நாடகாவில் பல்வேறு மாவட்டங்களில் உள்ள கிராமங்களில் வாழ்கிறார்கள் . நாகரித்தில் மிகவும் பின் தங்கிய சமூகமாகவே இருக்கிறார்கள் .வெளி மக்களுடன்

தொடர்பு கொள்வதே கிடையாது. அவர்கள் சமூக மக்களுடன் மட்டுமே பழகுவார்கள். பெண்கள் மீதான கட்டுப்பாடுகள் அதிகம். அதனை மீறுபவர்களுக்கு கடுமையான தண்டனைகள் விதிப்பார்கள். கர்நாடக அரசு இப்போது தான் இதில் கவனம் செலுத்தி சில நடவடிக்கைகளை எடுத்துள்ளது.

## உடலே பேராயுதம்

உலகம் முழுவதும் பெண்களின் உடலை வைத்து கட்டமைக்கப்படுகிற அதிகார குவியல் எண்ணிலடங்காதது. இதனை ஒடுக்கும் முயற்சியில் தான் ஃபிமென் என்ற பெண்ணிய அமைப்பு ஐரோப்பிய நாடுகளில் மிகப்பெரிய விழிப்புணர்வையும், பெண் உடல் மீதான கட்டமைக்கப்படும் அரசியலை அதனை வழியிலேயே சென்று தகர்க்கும் முயற்சியில் ஈடுபட்டுள்ளது. திறந்தமார்புகள் தான் பேராயுதம் என்ற முழக்கத்தோடு மேலாடை இல்லாமல் பாலியல் சுரண்டலுக்கு எதிராக, பாலின சமத்துவத்துக்காக, மதத்தின் பெயரால் கட்டமைக்கப்பட்டிருக்கும் பெண்களின் உடலரசியலுக்கு எதிராக கோஷம் இட்டு நிற்கிறார்கள். 40 பேருடன் தொடங்கிய இந்த அமைப்பில் இன்று லட்சக்கணக்கான பெண்கள் உக்ரைன், பிரான்ஸ் மற்றும் உலகம் முழுவதும் நேரடியாகவும் சமூகவலைதளங்களிலும் உறுப்பினர்களாக இருக்கிறார்கள். பெண்ணிய கோட்பாடுகள் கொண்டிருந்தாலும் ஆயுதங்களோடு ஒரு தேசத்தின் ராணுவ கட்டமைப்பு போன்று அமைப்பை உருவாக்கி இருக்கிறார்கள். உறுப்பினரானதும் உளவியல் திடப் பயிற்சி, உடற்பயிற்சி அனைத்தும் கற்றுக் கொடுக்கப்படும். பிரான்சில் உள்ள அனைத்து பல்கலைக்கழகங்களில் உள்ள மாணவிகளும் இந்த இயக்கத்தில் பெரும்பாலானோர் உறுப்பினர்கள். ஃபிமென் பெண்கள் தனியார் செய்தி நிறுவனம் ஒன்றை நடத்துகிறார்கள். அதற்கான ஆசிரியர், நிருபர்கள், புகைப்படக்காரர்கள், வடிவமைப்பாளர், ஒளிப்பதிவாளர் அனைத்துமாக அந்த குழுவே செயல்படுகிறது. அதனால் தான் ஐரோப்பிய ஊடகங்கள் ஃபிமென் அமைப்பை "பெண் மிலிட்டரி" என்று வர்ணிக்கின்றன.

ரஷ்ய அதிபர், விளாதிமர் புதினும், ஜெர்மனி அதிபர் ஏஞ்சலா மெர்கலும் ஜெர்மனி வர்த்தக கண்காட்சியில் பங்கேற்றபோது மேலாடை இல்லாமல் திறந்த மார்போடு போராட்டம் நடத்தினார்கள். போப் பிரானிசில் பெனிடிக்ட் இவர்களது போராட்டத்தில் இருந்து தப்பவில்லை. ஓர் பால் சேர்க்கைக்கு எதிராக செயல்படும் கிறிஸ்துவ பண்பாடுகள், தேவாலய விதிமுறைகளுக்கு கண்டனம் தெரிவிக்க தேவாலயங்கள் முன்பு போராட்டங்களுக்கு ஃபிமென் பெண்கள் திறங்கிறார்கள். இல்லாமிய பெண்கள் ஷ்ரியத் சட்டங்களால் படும் அவதிகளில் இருந்து வெளிக்கொணர் ஃபிமென் போராட்டம் நடத்துகிறது. இப்படி நாட்டில் மதத்தின் பெயரில் பெண்களுக்கு ஏற்படும் நெருக்கடிகளில் இருந்து விடுவிப்பதற்கு தொடர்ந்து நூதன போராட்டங்களை முன்னெடுக்கிறது அந்த அமைப்பு. இந்த அமைப்பினர் போராட்ட களங்களில் ஆயுதம் ஏந்துவதில்லை, பதாகைகள் தாங்குவதில்லை. அவர்களது உடல்கள் தான் பேராயுதம்.

உலகம் முழுவதும் பெண் உறுப்பு சிதைப்பு அதாவது பெண்ணுறுப்பின் கந்து வெட்டி தையல் இடும் பழக்கத்திற்கு எதிராக போராடி வருகிறார்கள். இப்படி உலகம் முழுவதும் பெண்கள் சந்திக்கும் உடலரசியல்

பிரச்சினைகளை கலைய அங்கே ஃபிமென் துணை நிற்கிறது. தந்தை மரபாட்சியை ஒழித்து ஆணாதிக்கத்தை வேரறுத்து தாய்வழி சமூகத்தை உலகம் மூழுவதம் கட்டமைப்போம் என்பது தான் ஃபிமென் பெண்கள் குழுவின் இலக்கு. பெண்கள் மீது இந்தியாவில் நடத்தப்படும் அனைத்து வன்முறைகளுக்கும் தீர்வு காண வேண்டுமெனில் உயிர்மூச்சாக ஃபிமென் அமைப்பின் இலக்கு இன்று இந்திய பெண்கள் ஒவ்வொருவருக்கும் அவசியம் தேவை.

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **SUGITHA**

A Special Correspondent with Kalaingar TV, Sugitha works both in Print and electronic media. She hosts talk shows/debates on various social issues. She also has a book of poems and essays to her credit. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Feature

## **BADILO METTELA SAVVADI THE TINKLE OF TOE RINGS IN THE SCHOOL**

**CHANNEL: ABN ANDHRAJYOTI**

**M**ahbubnagar, is a drought prone district in Telangana State and seasonal migration to Mumbai and other cities is common during the dry season. The feature Badilo Mettela Savvadi exposes the link between seasonal migration and child marriages in the region.

The feature highlights the data that about 12 lakh people from the district migrate to Mumbai, Hyderabad and other cities every year, leaving their families behind. Leaving young adolescent girls in the village is often not considered a safe option by many parents. Consequently, many parents perform the marriages of their daughters before their seasonal migration.

It is estimated that about 125 minor girls got married in 2015 and around 90 child marriages were averted by the joint action of Integrated Child Development Authority (ICDA) and Child Line. Child marriages force girls to discontinue schooling and this is reflected in the poor literacy rate of 56.65 per cent in the district. In 15 backward Mandals of the district, the literacy rate is lower than 50%. Gattu Mandal is notorious for child marriages with a literacy rate of 34.45.

Badi lo Mettela Savvadi focuses on the government school at Maddur Mandal headquarters which has a large number of married adolescent girls, who are over burdened with the responsibilities of adult women. Manga, a 9th standard student says that she got married when she was in 8th standard. "My father forcibly convinced me to marry during our summer holidays when I was 14. Now, I have to wake up early, not for study purpose or revision of lessons but, to do all the work at my in-laws house followed by cooking. After completing the work, I come to school. But I am unable to focus on my studies due to tiredness after all the work at home."

Bheemamma, a 10th standard student says that she lost her mother in childhood and her father forced her to marry a relative. "Even today parents consider a girl child a burden and try to reduce their burden by marrying her off in childhood. Most girls oppose the underage marriages, but, they

are silenced with violence and made to bow their heads before the grooms". While the other children keep playing during the break period and sports period, the married adolescent girls sporting the mangal sutras and toe rings (symbols of marriage) are lost in their thoughts and worries of adulthood.



#### **CHANDU THULASI**

With over 10 years of experience in journalism Chandu Thulasi's passion is field reporting. She has done a number of special ground reports on issues of women and children. She is presently working at the news channel ABN Andhrajyoti. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Feature

## ANTARANI BATUKAMMA

*Untouchable Batukamma*

**CHANNEL: ABN ANDHRAJYOTI**



Antarani Batukamma looks at the conflation of caste, gender and politics in the celebration of the annual Flower Festival of Telengana, Batukamma.

While Batukamma has its roots as the festival of the Dalits and the lower castes, the folklore says that they lost the right to celebrate it due to a mishap that happened long ago while celebrating it, attracting the anger of the Goddess. Thereafter, the festival was appropriated and celebrated by the higher castes alone.

The political movement for separate Telengana brought the people together, projecting Batukamma as the cultural identity and state festival of Telangana. Celebration of Batukamma was used to bring all the sections of the society together including the lower castes and dalits, who were asked to celebrate Batukamma festival with great fervor.

However, after the formation of the Telengana State, the social divisions are back in place and once again the lower caste and dalit women are being denied the freedom to celebrate Batukamma. So much so that this division is practiced within the Secretariat Employees Association's celebrations. It is in spite of the fact that the State Government grants 10 crore every year for celebrating the state festival.



### CHANDU THULASI

With over 10 years of experience in journalism Chandu Thulasi's passion is field reporting. She has done a number of special ground reports on issues related to women and children. She is currently working with the news channel ABN Andhrajyoti. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Investigative Story

# LGBTQ+

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In the past few years the LGBTQ+ issues have been brought into the public domain due to the momentum being gained by the LGBTQ+ movement. While there has been a positive acknowledgement of the transgender person's and their rights by the judiciary and governments, the homophobia and transphobia continue to hold strong with section 377 treating alternate sexuality as a crime. We have here a selection of articles that look at LGBTQ+ issues from diverse perspectives.

Amrita Nandy writes about the range of genders and sexualities and questions the logic of giving legal rights to transgender persons, while criminalizing homosexuality. She argues that the fluidity of genders and sexualities, in fact, makes the separation of the rights of transgendered persons from the LGBTQ+ community untenable and is a reflection of the deep rooted homophobia and heteronormative values of our society.

The violence against LGBTQ+ community also stems from the same power equations that promote violence against women. Vulnerability, disempowerment and deprivation make them the targets of extreme forms of sexual violence and exploitation. Annam Suresh documents the lives of the 'Laundas', the transgender boys who dance at weddings and the sexual violence that they are subjected to by men, the exploitation by the band masters and the response of the system to their plight.

Equally important are the power equations within the LGBTQ+ movement. Speaking about the privileged and entitled upper caste leaders in the movement, Moulee says there is a need to acknowledge and give voice to the experiences of the dalits within the community.

Sindhuvasini highlights the dilemmas faced by the celebrity gay men who come out of the closet. Responding to Karan Johar's comment, at a literature festival, condemning Section 377 and demanding for a life free of discrimination across genders and sexualities. Sindhu critiques Karan Johar's films that mock LGBTQ+ persons thus deepening the stereotypes community.

On a different note the photo feature 'Bishesh Glam- A World Within A World' features the 'Nupi Maanbi' transgender community of Manipur which occupies an important position in the beauty industry with many of them excelling in the feminine skills of beauty care. The photo feature captures transwomen in action, accompanied by a narrative that captures their journey, dreams and aspirations.

Exhilarating and insightful, the above selection of articles give us a peek into the experiences, challenges and triumphs of the LGBTQ+ communities, educating and enlightening us about the multi-dimensionality of genders and sexualities.



## TICKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

*The Indian Express, September 17, 2014*

*Centre must grasp the differences and overlaps between LGB and T identities.*

**A**t long last, the transgendered, among our most persecuted communities, are poised to access their fundamental human rights, thanks to the April 2014 ruling of the Supreme Court, which directed the government to officially recognise and empower them. This is great news, but only so far.

The government has now put a spoke in the wheel, objecting to the court's broad use of the term transgender. Apparently, at one point, the ruling suggests that "transgender" includes the L, G and B of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender), the alphabetical tent that holds together a diverse spectrum of sexual and gender orientations. However, by the end of the same paragraph, the judgment clearly states: "while dealing with the present issue we are not concerned with this aforesaid wider meaning of the expression transgender". Why then has the government engaged in such superfluous finger-pointing? In seeking an unambiguous interpretation for inherently ambiguous practices, it reveals its prejudice. Is it miffed at the imagined inclusion of homosexuals, a community that its conservative side has no truck with? The government should revisit the essence of the judgment, but only after it acquires a nuanced understanding of the differences, overlaps and similarities between the transgender and homosexual identities.

On the subject of differences, transgenderism and homosexuality cannot always be collapsed under a singular, homogenising label. Simply put, gay, lesbian and bisexual are variations in sexual orientation. The transgendered represent a dissonance between one's assigned and chosen gender identity. Unlike homosexuals, transgender individuals often experience gender dysphoria. For some, this takes the form of acute body dysphoria, making them undergo sex reassignment surgeries to alter the physical appearance of their bodies, besides long-term hormonal therapies and so on. For a majority of transgender individuals who do not redesign their bodies, life can be harrowing, especially in transphobic cultures. This is best personified by the familiar and most visible transgender person: the hijra. Ostracised and exploited, hijras are denied fundamental rights and opportunities, such as



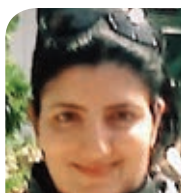
education and livelihood, and thus are compelled to beg or extort money. A transgendered individual may be heterosexual, and seek rights such as marriage, adoption and so on. In contrast, the issue of marriage has left the global homosexual community divided, with many refusing to replicate the patriarchal, heteronormative marriage. Therefore, practically and politically, the needs, struggles and challenges of the transgendered are unique and cannot always be aligned with the homosexual community.

But the transgendered may not always be totally distinct from the homosexual: there are overlaps. In the application presented by the ministry of social justice and empowerment, the government defines “transgender” as “all persons whose own sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned to them at birth. They will include trans-men and trans-women (whether or not they have undergone sex reassignment surgery or hormonal treatment or laser therapy etc), gender queers and a number of socio-cultural identities, such as kinnars, hijras, aravanis, jogtas etc.” While this is an inclusive definition, it does not cover the overlaps. In an imaginary Venn diagram depicting the two sets of identities (transgender and homosexual), a trans-woman in a lesbian relationship exemplifies an overlap. In fact, the government’s application itself recognises this complexity — “it may be possible for some transgender persons to also be gay, lesbian or bisexual”. Since all transgender people are not “straight”, how will the government fit the homosexual-transgender in an unambiguous policy?

Nonetheless, this hyphenated identity does not always convey political kinship. There is common ground between L, G, B and T that, despite their differences, bands them together not just in letter (literally), but also in spirit. Personally, the transgendered and homosexual face harassment. Socially, they are seen as deviant and are discriminated against. Politically, they

ride the same bandwagon as allies in a broad coalition against pervasive heteronormativity and sexism.

In this context, the government's response is unsettling, to begin with. If it is concerned about semantics, why not object to "third gender", a term based on the dated assumption that gender is a binary, not a spectrum? Second, it is lopsided: it supports self-determination of gender but rejects the right to choose one's sexuality. Just as gender cannot be assigned to others, sexual identity cannot be marked conclusively. Gender and sexuality are textured and dynamic, elusive of our attempts to neaten, flatten and box. Perhaps they are best understood as multiple and conflictual. Yet, awed and bullied by the master-narrative of heteronormativity, our gender-sexuality orientations often stay in place, performing their "straight" scripts.



**DR. AMRITA NANDY**

Dr Amrita Nandy is a researcher and writer whose work spans issues of gender, rights and culture. She has written for a range of Indian and International dailies and magazines and published papers in international books and journals. Her forthcoming book is on choice and motherhood. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Op-Ed

# सॉरी करण जौहर, आपने बहुत देर कर दी

Navbharattimes online, January 25, 2016

दू

सरोँ का दुख-दरुद बांटने के दो तरीके हैं, सिम्पथी यानी सहानुभूति और समानुभूति यानी इम्पथी। अगर कोई उस अनुभव या दरुद से गुजर रहा है जिससे कभी आप भी गुजर चुके हैं तो जाहिर है आप उसकी परेशानी बेहतर तरीके से समझ सकेंगे। जैसे कि कहा जाता है कि एक मां ही दूसरी मां को समझ सकती है या टूटे दिल का दरुद वही समझ सकता है जिसका खुद का दिल भी कभी टूटा हो।

हालांकि यह जरूरी भी नहीं है, दूसरोँ को समझना काफी हद तक आपकी संवे. दनशीलता पर भी निर्भर करता है। कई बार देखने में आता है कि एक महिला ही महिला की परेशानी को नहीं समझती या कोई बाँस अपने जूनियर की दिक्कतें नहीं समझता जबकि वह खुद भी कभी उन हालात से दो-चार हो चुका रहता है।

खैर, मैं बात करना चाहती हूँ फिल्म इंडस्ट्री के जाने-माने डायरेक्टर करण जौहर के हालिया बयान की। करण जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्ट में एलजीबीटी समुदाय के अधिकारों के लिए काफी 'जागरूक' नजर आए। उन्होंने यहां कहा कि भारत में आईपीसी की धारा 377 (समलैंगिकता को अपराध ठहराने वाली धारा) को खत्म किया जाना चाहिए और किसी के साथ सेक्शुअल ऑरियंटेशन के आधार पर किसी भी तरह का भेदभाव नहीं होना चाहिए।

बहुत अच्छी बात है कि आखिरकार करण ने समलैंगिकता के मसले पर पहली बार खुलकर अपनी राय रखी, लेकिन क्या आपको नहीं लगता कि उन्होंने मुंह खोलने में काफी देर कर दी? खासतौर से जब वह खुद सेक्शुअल ऑरियंटेशन पर आधारित भेदभाव झेलते आए हैं। उन्होंने अपने बचपन की यादें साझा कीं और बताया कि किस तरह उन्हें 'पैसी' कहकर चिढ़ाया जाता था। जाहिर है उन्होंने काफी मुश्किल समय देखा होगा लेकिन अफसोस की बात यह है कि उन्होंने खुद अपनी फिल्मों में समलैंगिकों का जमकर मजाक उड़ाया। इतना ही नहीं, गे कॅरक्टर्स को बेहूदे और भद्दे तरीके से पेश किया (फिल्म बॉम्बे टॉकीज अपवाद है)।

शायद करण को लगा था कि भारतीयों के लिए समलैंगिकता हंसने-हंसाने का एक विषय है, इसलिए उन्होंने अपनी फिल्मों में स्टीरियोटिपिकल होमोसेक्शुअल कॅरक्टर्स लाकर 'कॉमिडी' का तड़का लगाने की कोशिश की। लेकिन 'दोस्ताना' में अभिषेक बच्चन और जॉन अब्राहम के बीच जैसा इक्वेशन दिखाकर दर्शकों को हंसाने की कोशिश की गई है, क्या हम उसे संवेदनशील कहेंगे? या फिर 'कल हो न हो' में शाहरुख खान और सैफ अली को जैसे गे होने का नाटक करते दिखाया

गया, क्या वह फनी है? मेरे हिसाब से तो बिल्कुल भी नहीं। हो सकता है कइयों ने इन दृश्यों और संवादों पर ठहाके भी लगाए हों लेकिन इससे उनकी नासमझी और मजबूत ही हुई होगी।

चलिए, मान लिया की करण जौहर कमर्शल फिल्में बनाते है और उन्हें कमाई करनी है। लेकिन क्या ये वजहें उन्हें किसी खास तबके का मजाक बनाने का अधिकार देती हैं? और इतने दिनों से एलजीबीटी समुदाय के लोग और सोशल ऐक्टिविस्ट्स अपने हक की लड़ाई लड़ रहे हैं, क्या करण जौहर ने कभी उनकी आवाज बनने की कोशिश की?

किसी भी मुहिम में जब जाने-पहचाने चेहरे शामिल हो जाते हैं तो उसके कामयाब होने की गुंजाइश बढ़ जाती है। एक सिलेब्रिटी होने के नाते और सामाजिक दायित्व निभाने के नाते भी अगर करण जौहर समलैंगिकों के साथ आते तो अच्छा होता लेकिन उन्होंने ऐसा कुछ नहीं किया।

आज जब लोग अपनी सेक्सुअलिटी के बारे में निडर होकर बोल रहे हैं और धारा 377 को हटाने के लिए लगातार संघर्ष कर रहे हैं, ऐसे में क्या हम करण जौहर से कम से कम इस मुद्दे पर एक संवेदनशील फिल्म की उम्मीद कर सकते हैं? वैसे इस मामले में करण काफी पिछड़ गए हैं। दीपा मेहता, ओनिर और सोनाली बोस जैसे डायरेक्टर्स समलैंगिकता पर बेहतरीन फिल्में दे चुके हैं।

करण, आखिरकार इस मुद्दे पर बोलने के लिए आपका शुक्रिया लेकिन माफ की. जिएगा, आपने बहुत देर कर दी।



#### SINDHUVASINI

Coming from Uttar Pradesh and having faced problems related to gender discrimination, Sindhuvasini is a young media professional striving to bring about a change by voicing her opinions and raising awareness by consistently writing on issues concerning mental health, women and sexual minorities. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Blog

## DEAR SAVARNA QUEER MEN, LET'S TALK ABOUT CASTEISM WITHIN OUR MOVEMENT

*The News Minute, June 16, 2016*

*Remember, it's your caste preference that makes you choose that Mylapore vegetarian hotel for your queer meet-up.*

**H**eterosexual privilege allows a person to not hide their sexuality and relationship to the world. Our society is built on the norms of heterosexuality, that's why we have Gay Pride March and not straight pride march. From time to time I do hear someone insist that they need straight pride march saying that queer people push their 'gay' agenda and the queer mafia threatens the supposedly straight world. The queer community has learnt to laugh it off. We are unapologetic about wearing our sexuality on our sleeves. We are normalizing the world by queering it. In India we are still in early stages. But we will soon be there, because the queer community has no qualms about fighting for our civil rights.

But when I walk shoulder to shoulder with my fellow queer people, fighting for our rights, I am being oppressed by queer comrades on different fronts. The oppression is blatant, subtle, behind my back and violent. But I am not allowed to talk about it. Because in the queer world and in the queer movement in India, I am allowed to only carry my queer identity. I am allowed to talk only about the discrimination I face for being a gay man. Because the oppressors are them - straight people. The few straight allies in the discussion are tuned in and sensitized to the extent that they feel guilty when we talk about the homophobia in society. They don't feel uncomfortable in our safe spaces when we talk about the discrimination.

The queer community and its allies acknowledge heterosexual privilege, and cis-man privilege. But why do we have problem acknowledging caste privilege? The queer community has come a long way from defending ourselves from people who called us unnatural, deviant and perverts. We no longer defend ourselves on these fronts. We demand our civil rights, the human dignity that we are entitled to. But the sad thing is, the anti-caste movement – which is older than the coining of the term LGBT – still struggles with basic questions of caste. This is something that we must learn from our straight allies who do a good job of acknowledging their heterosexual privilege. But savarna people within the queer movement have a hard time acknowledging their own caste privilege.

The queer community, which is dominated by savarna cis-men, provides lip service to the acknowledgement of caste within the community. But the problem is that savarna people act as voices of the oppressed. Appropriation of voices is also a form of discrimination and violence. If a savarna person wants to talk about caste, the first step is to acknowledge your privilege; then to talk about the kind of oppression that you make people like me to endure. Unless you realize this, you cannot talk against caste and about intersectionality. If I am allowed to talk about the discrimination I face as a gay man, I am equally entitled to talk about the discrimination that I face as a Dalit-Bahujan person. I don't want you to talk about my experiences. Because you have not experienced what it is to be a Dalit-Bahujan. It is my experience and I will share it.

The queer space across India is dominated by savarna cis-gay-men. Some of them are in lavender heterosexual marriages, reaping additional privilege from the heterosexual world. Do not say caste is a thing of the past. Listen to our stories. Listen to us when we point out how you bring your caste preferences within the queer movement. Do not play the victim when we point out your privilege. Do not say 'not-all-upper castes...'. Do not say that you are helpless because you were born into that 'unfortunate' caste - you still carry your caste privilege.

Do not say you are casteless - that is offensive. When you plan a queer meet-up at that vegetarian hotel in Mylapore, remember that it is your caste preference that makes you choose that hotel. And do not think we are demonizing you when we point out your privilege based on the choices you make. And if you feel uncomfortable, it most likely means that you haven't acknowledged how your privilege benefits you. Learn from our straight allies on how to acknowledge privilege.



For long, the queer identity was built around shame. We know how it feels like to hide our sexuality. We know how it feels to lie about our relationship. I was naive enough to think that every queer person - savarna included - would understand how it is to live with the Dalit-Bahujan identity that has been built around shame.

The queer movement is not organized in India. But savarna men dominate it through their savarna social capital, and NGOs. There is a calculated power structure and dominance by these individuals in the queer scene. Those of us who fight our way to share our experiences as Dalit-Bahujan individuals in the queer community are shunned, ridiculed and ignored. A Tam-Brahm 'equal-rights' activist from Mumbai mocked the three Dalit queer persons who asserted their Dalit identity at the Delhi Queer Pride parade last year. The 'activist' mimed that the Dalit persons sharing their experiences on stage were mad.

Early this year a Brahmin gay activist blatantly told me that the queer community in Chennai is not ready to deal with caste issues within. It was then that I realized the mistake I made two years ago by suggesting that the Chennai Rainbow Pride March name in Tamil be changed from Vaanavil Perani (rainbow parade) to Vaanavil Suyamariyathai Perani (Rainbow Self-respect\* Parade). We had a discussion and formally changed it. Today we have Suyamariyathai in name, but without being true to the ideology.

Savarna queer activists and individuals must understand that it is not just their voices that need to be heard. They are not the sole representatives of the diverse queer community. Stop antagonizing those of us when we criticize how a few savarna men and their NGOs are hijacking the current queer movement. It is a shame that I have to say this, but Dalit-Bahujan individuals are as much a part of the queer movement. Our stories and experiences - both within the queer community and outside - need to be shared. We are unapologetic about asserting our oppressed caste identity as much as we assert out sexual and gender identity. We will call you out when you oppress us. And that doesn't mean we are diverging 'our' queer movement. We are just steering it towards the right direction.



#### **MOULEE**

Moulee is a gay activist based in Chennai. He chronicles diverse facets of the queer movement. He currently works in the IT industry where he focuses on inclusion of queer individuals at workplace. The above article appeared in a special edition of [www.thenewsminute.com](http://www.thenewsminute.com) a web magazine that received the LMAAGS 2015-16 Best Web Special Edition.



## BISHESH GLAM – A WORLD WITHIN A WORLD

[www.pointblank7.com](http://www.pointblank7.com), March 3, 2014



Bishesh Glam, located in a busy corner in Keishamphat in Imphal West, Manipur is just about two years old.

The salon run by Bishesh Huiem, a well known male-to-female transgender, however, has changed the lives of many Nupi Maanbis (one who looks like a woman).



Bishesh Huiem is one of the first Transgenders' who acted as Transgender character heroine in Manipuri films.

Nupi Maanbis or the transgenders of Manipur form a unique group in this hilly state. Like the transgenders in the rest of the country, they have faced discrimination of various kinds in the state.

Laifungbam Roy, president, Centre for Organisation Research & Education (CORE), which has been working with the LGBTs, in the state since the 1990's, says the root cause for the discrimination against the "otherly gendered" is patriarchy.

“Perpetrators of this form of discrimination range from close family members, acquaintances and government agencies and their personnel. This is mainly due to ingrained patriarchal values,” says Roy.



Somorjit, Bishesh's friend, getting ready for a photo shoot



Pandum, another friend, getting a facial



Pandum is a Shumang Leela artiste herself



Huirem, 24, who also enacts the female parts in “Shumang Leelas” (the traditional courtyard theatre of Manipur), says her family was dead set against her transitioning in the beginning.

*“In the beginning, my love for girly things often resulted in a beating from my strict father. Sometimes I would be locked up inside my room to be “straightened” out. My brother would often punish me for being too “effeminate,” says Huirem.*

Life, took a turn for the better after she went for her higher education outside the state in 2006. Huirem, a graduate from Garden City College, Bangalore in Fashion & Apparel Design believes education is the key to a better life.

The experience of running “Touch and Glow”, a beauty salon, near her campus with another fellow Transgender from the state, Robert Naorem, came in handy while setting up her own establishment, Bishesh Glam, in 2011.

She says she was lucky to have her elder sister’s backing who provided her with ₹3 lakhs to open her business, but most of her kind are less fortunate as they are often doubly discriminated on account of their gender and education.



Bishesh counselling Kenan, an intern in Bishesh's parlour

Most of them (her employees) come from the poorer strata of the society. Most of them are school drop-outs.

*"So, when I opened my business, I gave them fares (around Rs 50) everyday so that they can come and train under me to become beauticians or hairdressers. Now they can at least support themselves financially," says the five times winner of Miss Transgender Manipur.*

The salon, which on an average sees 15-20 footfalls a day, earns some ₹ 20,000 a month. However, business peaks up during the wedding season as they are in huge demand and are generally booked for three or more sessions a day. A bridal makeup artist usually charges ₹15,000 per session, out of which half of the amount goes to the proprietor of the salon.

Thoibi, 18, a young intern at Bishesh Glam describes the salon as a lifeline. The teenager who prefers to go by the name "Thoibi" named after the legendary Moirang princess was born as "Salman Khan" to an impoverished "Meitei Pangal" family (indigenous Muslim) of Manipur.



Thoibi, the young intern

*"She (Huirem) has been like a mother and sister to me. If not for her I could not even imagine where I would have been. She took me in. I was estranged from my parents due to my gender identity crisis," says Thoibi.*

In fact the beauty industry in Imphal is driven by the Trans women. More than half of the state capital's salons are run by them. Apart, from giving them a viable means of employment it also confers upon them some sort of social acceptance.



Pandum and Somorjit, Bishesh's friends in a photoshoot



On the day of Diwali

Kenand Brahmacharymayum, (18), an employee of the Salon says working in beauty related field gives them twin benefits.

*"We are more comfortable in this (fashion) field. We can also explore our feminine side too," says Brahmacharymayum.*



Kenand Brahmacharymayum, an intern in Bishesh's parlour, with a customer

Huirem, who also plans to launch a proper fashion school in the near future, says as of 9 September she has extended her expertise and training module to include "normal" females apart from Trans women.

The Former Miss Transgender Manipur who idolizes Mother Theresa says that though she and her kind have faced discriminations on account of their gender, but "Bishesh Institute of Fashion and Beauty" will take in everybody sans discrimination.

*"Anybody can join my school. Gender no bar," added Huirem.*



**SIDDHARTH HAOBJAM**

Siddharth is an independent photo journalist documenting the various social and cultural issues of Manipur – a detailed documentation of the transgenders of Manipur, traditional priests of Manipur etc to name a few. He currently heads a media organization Yeng Minna Si Media. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best Photo Feature

## OF ANKLETS AND SHACKLES

*Fountain Ink, October 8, 2014*



he laundas in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are a part of tradition at marriages and other events, but they carry with them a history of exploitation and sexual violence.

It's a long-standing tradition in small town and rural cow belt India. Few weddings or celebrations are considered complete without night-long song-and-dance events. But it's a practice that hides a world of pain, shame and sexual violence. Yet its popularity continues to grow as more and more families flaunt it as a sign of affluence and virile decadence.

In the wee hours, after everyone had gone to bed, they would dress up in the saris and skirts they had stolen from home, imagining themselves to be actresses romancing handsome heroes. Born as boys, but different from them, they had no one to turn to and nowhere to go.

As a young boy, Santosh had run away from home with two older boys who were having similar problems with their families—abuse and violence because they behaved like girls, preferring feminine dances and games to more masculine pastimes. They worked in a roadside dhaba, washing dishes and doing odd jobs in return for food and shelter. They also provided sexual services to drivers who stopped by.

At six, Santosh's favourite clothes had come from his mother's and sister's wardrobes. He loved draping his mother's chunni, wearing his sister's skirts and bangles, playing with her toys and dancing to Bollywood songs. His grandmother often teased him, calling him Santoshi. "Your mother prayed to Ma Santoshi and observed fasts for a son—but the Goddess has given us another daughter instead of a son." At the age of six, it seemed okay. Family and friends even thought it cute; no function was celebrated without Santosh's impromptu dances.

But no one thought it cute when at 10, Santosh continued to wear his sister's clothes and jewellery and danced to songs made famous by Sridevi and Madhuri Dixit. "Santoshi" became a taunt used by neighbours and schoolmates alike. By this time, he'd adopted the gait and gestures of the actresses, swinging his hips as he walked. Santosh was mocked and bullied in school and in the neighbourhood. Once, a group of boys even stripped

him to see if he was a boy or girl, tugging at his flaccid penis, pinching and pummelling his breasts to see if they would miraculously balloon.

Although he was in pain and nearly died of shame that day, Santosh was secretly happy at being seen as a girl. When his parents yelled at him, he wondered why they were angry. He did feel like a girl. At the school annual day functions and colony festivities, he continued to dress in feminine attire and dance, inviting whistles and catcalls that continued weeks after the event.

When Santosh was in class five, a neighbour dragged him into his house and sexually assaulted him, using a candle dipped in oil for lubrication, smothering the screams of pain with a resounding slap and threats of more violence. Santosh was badly hurt, in body and mind. For a week he couldn't walk straight and bled from a ruptured rectum.

Once, his father caught him being pawed in the marketplace. The boy ran home in shame. That evening, his father caned him, blaming his feminine ways for the incident. "You walk like a slut, how do you expect not to be treated like one?"

Santosh spent that night on a bench in a nearby park where he was repeatedly assaulted by two drunk cab drivers. As he sat weeping, he was approached by two older boys, who were going through the same situation at home. They decided to leave and that's when their new life began: at a highway dhaba. Though they got plenty of sex—they even liked it at times—it was still illegal, as they were minors.

One night, a bandmaster who had seen them dancing approached them. Would they join his band as professional dancers for Rs.400 a night? For the next few months, they would travel with the band and be paid every night they danced.

It seemed like the opportunity they had been waiting for. Although they had male names, they considered themselves female and had secretly renamed themselves Sonal, Deepa and Sumi years ago. They looked forward to using the names openly.

So they went to Uttar Pradesh (UP), near Ballia. Deepak (Deepa)—much younger then—was anticipating the thrill of coming out, as it were. "My first show was at a wedding near Gonda in UP. As soon as we reached the hall booked by the groom's family, we were shown to a shed at the back. No loos, we used the fields. After lunch we had to dress up and dance outside the groom's house on the street and then continue dancing with the baraat to the girl's house."



That was the plan, but not exactly what happened. Deepak's face clouds over at the recollection. "Initially the band would play lively music. But as the evening progressed, the men would get drunk and disorderly, demanding raunchier music and cruder dances. The guests would start pawing and molesting us. Once the women and children retired, the men would shed all inhibitions.

"They would drag us into any available room or shed, molest and rape us. Physically we're men so people say we can't be raped, but what we go through is gang rape and worse. Men took turns sodomising us, forcing us to give and receive oral sex.

"At one wedding, I was carried by a group of men into the field where I was assaulted all night. I lost count after the thirteenth assault because I had passed out. I woke up when the sun was already up—there were still three men and one was sodomising me. They had continued even when I was unconscious.

"They'd shoved liquor bottles up my anus, bitten me all over, stubbed cigarettes on my body, apart from punching, pinching and pummelling me. Somehow I picked myself up and ran to my shed. The other laundas there had been looking for me. Three of them had also been assaulted, but not as badly as me."

That was the new life, and worse. Deepak bares a shoulder to show me a scar; it's an old bullet wound. "It's common for guests to carry firearms to weddings and fire them during the ceremonies," he says. "They would threaten to shoot us if we didn't oblige." The scar is a grim reminder that saying no is dangerous in these parts.

Deepak fled his pursuers into an arhar dal field but he couldn't dodge the bullet. He remembers the pain and how he swallowed the scream that nearly followed. He crawled into a granary, hiding behind a pile of sacks. Luckily, the injury was not serious and he was back with the band by morning. They patched him up and pushed him back on the treadmill.

"When I told the bandmaster, he took me to a local quack. He stitched me up and gave me some injections. But I still had to dance that evening. Because of the dressing and the 'surgery', I escaped assault that night, but was forced to give oral sex to at least a dozen men."

Couldn't they have refused?

"Could we? Many of us were still kids—13, 14, 16 years old. We had run away from home to escape violence because we dressed and behaved differently. We had disgraced our families, we were failures at school, and we'd already been chased like bitches in heat, not just by boys but men old enough to be



our grandfathers. They too should be ostracised if we are deviants. But they had managed to hide their real nature and no one would believe that they were torturing me and my friends.”

What about the police, why didn't they go there?

“In UP?” he asks. “Ma'am, we were a bunch of weirdoes in an alien land. The bandmaster told us that in the small town, most policemen would be guests at the wedding. They weren't going to miss the booze and feast and the gifts they would get. Besides, the laundas were part of the treat. Why would they even think of entertaining our complaint? For all we know, some of our tormenters were policemen. This is how it is in the hinterlands of UP and Bihar.”

Not surprising in a state where former chief minister Mulayam Singh indulgently said “boys will be boys” while referring to rapists.

Hiring laundas is an old practice in boondocks Bihar and UP, where peasants who could not afford the rich courtesans patronised by the landlords would hire effeminate boys—usually between the ages of 15 and 25—to perform at weddings and festivals. Women were not allowed to dance on the streets. The rich hired female dancers to perform indoors and looked after them.

Poorer families settled for transgender boys at a fraction of the cost. In any case, women dancers in festive finery were probably not strong enough to accompany the *baraat*, dancing several kilometres to the bride's place from the groom's village. Hence, boys in female attire danced along the route and later at the wedding hall. They provided much of the entertainment and merrymaking through raunchy dances to risqué Hindi and Bhojpuri songs belted out by the band.

Over time, the *launda naach* became so popular that it is now an integral part of family celebrations in UP and Bihar, as well as during Holi, Dussehra, Chhat Puja, even at parties hosted by local politicians and businessmen. In fact, *launda* dancers are replacing female dancers even in middle and upper middle class families.

There are several reasons: it is easier to transport and house a bunch of males than females. Then, boys are more willing to go to extremes of vulgarity. They are also, oddly enough, a greater object of lust, curiosity and entertainment than women. In the feudal communities of UP and Bihar, they satisfy a much wider variety of sexual desires than women would.

What this says about the men is better left to the imagination, but one major reason why the boys are so much in demand is that there's no one to speak up

for them if they're exploited. They have invariably been thrown out of home. Women are not always estranged from family. Indeed, they are often sent out by the family.

As dropouts and runaways, the boys have limited options: begging or sex work. The chance to be a launda is highly tempting, not just because of the promise of steady money (usually breached), but also because they can openly dress and behave like women.

The schedule for a season is fixed by the bandmasters with the help of agents, who also play a key role in enlisting young dancers. The deal is ₹500 to ₹3,000 every performing day, depending on experience, looks, age, and so on, or a consolidated sum of ₹30,000 to ₹1 lakh for six to eight months. At the end of the season the boys are paid—usually only half or less of the promised sum—after deducting board, lodging, medical expenses, and travel. These deductions are not mentioned at recruitment: the impression given is that the boys will be paid the money in one lump sum at the end, while the band would take care of expenses.

Much of the medical expense is because of assaults—sexual and otherwise—by the hosts and their guests. Medical attention is limited to hasty surgeries to fix a ruptured anus, razor slashes, cigarette burns, and other outcomes of violent encounters with inebriated and disorderly guests who visit their latent sexual sadism upon the laundas.

Rape is considered a demonstration of sexual prowess and masculinity. Little is done to ensure privacy and the pain inflicted is often deliberate. It is not uncommon to have a dozen drunken men between the ages of 18 and 60 dragging a couple of laundas to a shed or to the fields and raping them in an act of violent competition.

Many groups hit the trail right after Diwali and return only in August, spending the intervening months as sex workers or performing odd jobs (including but not confined to sex) for rich landlords. They're in great demand for sex and sometimes get themselves attached to a single family or landlord.

Live-in laundas often end up as unpaid slaves, doing menial household chores, including looking after their man's children. He not only becomes his owner's sex slave but also has to entertain his friends. But after some years of providing constant physical gratification, when they lose their looks or fall prey to sexually transmitted diseases, they are cast away. After the season they either travel to other places for sex work or work with hijra teams, some undergoing castration for this.

In August, after a long season in UP and Bihar, Deepak returned to Kolkata, sharing a tiny room with another launda. He cut his long hair, grew a moustache, and tried to look like a man to visit his mother for five minutes while he handed over some of his earnings—which was not as untouchable as him and far more welcome. That was his routine until she was alive.

After she died, he moved back home to look after his sister. With fewer launda offers coming his way on account of age, he depends on prostitution as the primary source of income. He also freelances as an agent for a couple of bandmasters, looking for boys to lure into the abyss he has returned from, teaching them the nuances of dance and painting glamorous images of a dancing boy's life. There's no mention of the trauma that is a part of the launda's burden.

The lives of most launda dancers are alike—gender identity confusion in the early teens; strong and often violent opposition from family, school and community to their female attire and mannerisms; dropping out of school and leaving home; struggling for a livelihood through begging or sex work till they are approached by a bandmaster or agent (usually an ex-launda) to join a troupe; seasonal travels to UP and Bihar where they dance to earn money and are exploited in multiple ways, including sexual.

But the launda phase does not last forever, losing out to age, HIV, violence or death. After a decade or so in the business, they are forced out to seek other livelihoods. Most migrate to the only other trade they can ply—sex. Some manage to lure other boys into the launda business or prostitution for a commission. Some like Saikat, a rarity, make a clean getaway.

Saikat used ₹25,000 which he had saved to open a small paan and beedi shop. Maybe not so complete a getaway—many of his customers for paan, beedis and condoms are transgenders back from a launda spell. Occasionally, he will persuade a young, tortured "female soul" in male body to join a band and step unsuspecting into the hell he has seen. Some, like Sonam, a former launda, teach the young recruits seductive moves.

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **ANNAM SURESH**

Annam Suresh is a journalist/author who has been the recipient of a various Awards, both National and International, for her excellence in reporting. Besides writing Annam also works with corporates as consultant/trainer on workplace dynamics especially gender and diversity at workplace. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Feature

# Trafficking

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Trafficking is the third biggest illegal trade after arms and drugs dealings. Trafficking in human beings takes place for various reasons – cheap labour, sex, marriage etc.

Trafficking for marriage is increasing with more and more states reporting skewed sex ratios. The stories presented in this section show how deficit of women does not increase their value in a patriarchal society, but actually increases their vulnerability to violence and exploitation.

Danish Raza investigates into the rampant practice of trafficking for marriage. He exposes the lives of the 'paros' or 'molkis'- women trafficked for marriage and traded like cattle for a few thousand rupees in the states of Haryana, Punjab and Western Uttar Pradesh, which have skewed sex ratios. The violence and exploitation of the paros, their vulnerability and emotional trauma are captured with empathy and sensitivity.

Ayush Goel provides a peek into the daily lives of women trafficked for marriage through poignant case studies and stark pictures.

Rupa Hasan's story gives an insight into the other side of trafficking for marriage – the active involvement of parents and brokers in arranging 'guzar' marriages in Dharwad district of Karnataka where women are traded for marriage, but who often end up in sex trade.

What happens to young women who are lured out of their homes with false promises? This is a story not often told. Priyanka Kaushal exposes the fate of young girls from poor families from Bastar in Chattisgarh who are trafficked to the garment factories in the Southern States. Her feature brings out the reality of their lives, how society ignores and discriminates against them and the urgent need for their rehabilitation.

It is not often that girls rescued from flesh trade get an opportunity to pursue their education and rebuild their lives. Anwasha Banerjee tells the inspiring story of courage and dedication of two girls rescued from flesh trade - Noor and Suhana, who cleared the 12th Standard Board Exam, with the support of their families.

These stories of systematic exploitation, total dehumanization of the victims and depravation of the touts, the middle men and the buyers, are hard hitting and disturbing. They drive home the point that we need to work harder on protecting our vulnerable children and women who are increasingly becoming the soft targets of traffickers.

## CHEAPER THAN CATTLE

*Hindustan Times, March 23, 2014*

**R**ubina appears much older than the 40 years she admits to. She does not look you in the eye; she is hardly audible, and often trembles. Her hut, on the outskirts of Guhana village in Haryana's Mewat district, is surrounded by garbage heaps and excreta. There is no water or electricity and the hut is filled with acrid smoke from the cooking fire. "This is how our stories end," she says, shooing away a stray dog.

Widowed three months ago, she was thrown out by her in-laws as she is a *paro* or *molki* ('*molki*' literally means 'one who has a price') — the terms used for women who have been purchased in other states and brought to the region.

These are pejorative labels in Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh where the skewed sex ratio and entrenched feudalism has resulted in a flourishing trade in women trafficked from the poverty-ridden villages of Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha.

The women, who are usually promised marriage, find themselves in places like Mewat where the go-betweens sell them — sometimes repeatedly — to men who cannot find local women. Cut off from their native states, they are often confined and forced to work as bonded labour or pushed into forced marriages or prostitution.

The *molki* phenomenon is now so common that these areas even have common sayings that refer to the condition of these women — like the one that says it's impossible to find a *paro's* grave as she is passed on from man to man and so doesn't stay in one place for long.

"We *paros* belong nowhere. We are treated like animals. If a man has to choose between leaving a local woman and one from outside, he kicks us out; if a man is in need of money, we are sold," said Rubina, originally from Assam, who was forced into marriage at 16.

A field study by the NGO Drishti Stree Adhyayan Prabodhan Kendra revealed that out of 10,000 households they surveyed in Haryana, over 9,000 married women were bought from other states.

Less than two hours drive from New Delhi, Mewat is one of the 21 districts of Haryana, which has the most imbalanced sex ratio in the country — 879 women for every 1,000 men against the national average of 927 to 1,000. “More than 30% of men in Haryana between the ages of 15 and 44 are unmarried because of the skewed sex ratio.

When they don’t get women locally, they obtain them from other states,” said Dr Prem Chowdhry, an independent researcher based in New Delhi former fellow at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, who has worked extensively on shifting marriage patterns in north India.

Village heads in Mewat revealed that early marriages and economic factors add to the problem. Indeed, the trade in women is now accepted as normal in this area. “Families here don’t give their daughters to men who are older than 20, poor, handicapped or widowed. If you belong to any of these categories, you will have to buy a bride,” said Zakir Hussain, the sarpanch of Luhinga Khurd village. “In every village, you will find at least 15 paros. It is common here,” he added.

According to the 2011 census, about 72% of the population in rural Haryana, including more than 60% of the women, is literate. Nearby Gurgaon is an IT hub and hosts many automobile manufacturing units including Maruti Suzuki. But that’s only part of the picture. 70% of the state’s population continues to be engaged in the agricultural sector.

Shafiq Ur Rehman, founder, Empower People, an NGO working with survivors of bride trafficking, said the practice is rooted in the history of the region. “North India, including Haryana, has been a battle ground. Polygamy, and the claiming of women along with jewellery and property as war prizes, was common,” he said.

The National Crime Records Bureau report data shows that more than 22,000 girl children and women between the ages of 10 and 30 were kidnapped for marriage in 2012.

“The demand for ‘marriageable age’ girls is so intense that organised trafficking rackets have started operating in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh,” said a 2013 report commissioned by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Ghausia Khan, bride trafficking survivor and a member of a district legal aid authority reveals that, on average, a girl is sold between two to five times. “You will never find a paro staying with the man who brings her to Haryana or

to a neighbouring state," she said. This is borne out by Rubina, who was sold twice before she settled with her husband whose family eventually turned her out after his death.

According to Shafique, the price of a paro varies between ₹5,000 and ₹ 30,000 depending on her age and features. He does not buy the argument that parents sell their daughters out of poverty. "The only person who gets money in the process is the middle man," he said.

Given her transformation into a literal commodity, an 'object' that can be bought and sold, and used as currency, the woman at the centre of the transaction has no say in her fate. Whether she serves as a bonded labourer, a sex slave, a house maid, or will be accorded the status of a wife all depends on the inclinations and circumstances of her buyer (see accompanying stories).

While some, like Rubina, are abandoned after the death of their husbands, others live with the humiliation of being a paro. Married or not, they are never treated at par with local women. "Sending local women out to work in the field is not considered good here. Paros serve as cheap labour," said Susmita Guru.

The UN report has also noted that a sizeable number of those trafficked for domestic work amounting to bonded labour are from Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Most of the trafficked women were unwilling to talk as they fear being ostracized by the villagers. This poses a challenge to NGOs who cannot intervene unless a woman registers a protest or if a case of trafficking has been clearly established. As a result, much of their work is limited to case documentation.

The authorities are similarly handicapped. "We are yet to get a single complaint where a girl alleges that she was bought. Even for suo-moto action, we have to follow some leads. But there exist none," said Mewat SP Anil Dhawan.

### **SOLD WHEN PREGNANT**

Razia is not sure about the number of times she has been sold. It began when she was brought, at 14, from Bihar's Bhagalpur district to Rajasthan. She does not remember the features of the man who brought her. Yet, her memory of him is indelible. "He was the first to rape me. It continued for three days. Then he sent me to some other place where I lived may be for a month," she said. There, again, she was violated by at least five men.

The broker then dumped her with Shahnawaz, a man in Akheda, a village in Mewat, Haryana. Shahnawaz, who was already married and a father of six, married Razia.

Razia believes he did it for a male child. "His only son from his first wife had not keeping well for two years. Doctors in the village declared that he would not survive," Razia says.

When she was three months pregnant with her second child, Shahnawaz left Razia with a family in a neighbouring village saying she had to help them at a family wedding. When she did not hear from him for a month, she got suspicious. That was when she learnt that she had been sold for ₹25,000.

Razia returned to Shahnawaz when the panchayat interfered and admonished him. No police complaint was lodged.

But Razia's hardships did not end. Shahnawaz and his first wife both died about two years ago and Razia was pushed out of the family by her step sons.

She now makes ₹ 3,000 a month by cooking meals for students at a madrasa. Her elder son, 19-year-old Hamid, runs a tyre puncture shop nearby. Opposite the madrasa are a number of shops that Shahnawaz owned.

"This is the empire of my husband which is now with his sons. And I am made to live like a beggar," she says.

### **TWO SISTERS WORTH ₹ 12,000**

Lakshmi was 12 years old when she woke up one day in Haryana. She recalls that the floods had wreaked havoc in Assam, when a man approached her father and asked him to send both his daughters to Delhi for a better future. He showed them a picture of the prospective groom. "He gave my father ₹ 12,000 for me and my sister," says the 26-year-old who now lives in Gadhola village.

Lakshmi was brought to Haryana's Mewat district and handed over to a man in his late fifties. He was the uncle of the boy whose picture had been shown to Lakshmi's father. No marriage was not performed and she had to live with the man. When she objected, she was repeatedly beaten by the broker.

After a year and numerous pleas, the middlemen took her back to Assam where she narrated her woes to her father. "But the only way my father could get me back was by returning the ₹ 6,000 he had been paid for me. He didn't have it," she said. The broker also threatened to malign her reputation and make it difficult for her to live in Assam.



Once again, the broker showed Lakshmi's father a photograph of a man and assured him that, this time, she would certainly be married. Once again, money changed hands. "I saw the broker taking ₹ 10,000 from Amit," she says, referring to her husband.

Amit is a truck driver who lives outside Mewat for most of the year. Lakshmi does odd jobs at nearby farms. She says that when he is home, Amit abuses her sexually and physically. He has taken away her mobile phone. "When I resist, he says he can kick me out anytime and sell me for ₹ 5,000. This is the worth of a paro. Even a buffalo costs more."

### **MEET GHAUSIA KHAN, A TORCH BEARER FOR MEWAT'S PAROS**

With her dark complexion and rounded features, Ghausia Khan (58) stands out from the crowd at the Mewat district court. Dressed in a blue salwar kameez, a dupatta covering her head, and her feet are in worn-out slippers, her wrinkled face and her slow walk makes Ghausia look older than her age. A member of the district legal aid authority, she consoles a woman sitting across her desk.

"We will teach them a lesson. Do not give up. If you keep quiet, they will get encouraged," Khan tells the newly-wed. Pointing to the henna on the woman's hands, Khan says, "She got married a week ago. Her in-laws have thrown her out because her father could only give five tractors in dowry instead of seven."

Khan helps women in distress to find lawyers and provides them with legal information and at times, monetary assistance. But more than any of these, it is her moral support, she says, which enables victims to overcome the trauma. She has intervened in the cases of local women as well as paros trapped in involuntary marriages.

At one level, Khan is fighting a battle to get rid of her past. At 14, she herself was brought from Hyderabad, around 1,000 miles from Haryana. Eventually, she married Rusdaar Khan who grazed cattle. Ghausia gave birth to their first child at 17.

As money was hard to come by, she took up odd jobs at a carpet workshop and then a biscuit-making factory before joining Empower People, an organisation that works with bride trafficking survivors.

"Initially, I used to get nervous as my work involves interfering in family affairs and regular interaction with policemen and lawyers. But that is all past. Now, I am no less than a police woman," Ghausia says. "I can relate to their woes as I share their past."

She wants to develop a network of survivors whom she can train to take up new cases. Once that is achieved, she says, she would move on to play a bigger, political role. "I wish to contest the upcoming assembly election as an independent candidate. As a legislator, I will be able to work for these women in a more meaningful way," she says, adding that none of the existing political parties will give her a ticket as she is a Paro, and is therefore considered an outsider.

At home, in her semi-plastered single floor structure in Mewat's Ferozpur Namak village, it is hard to find Ghausia, the activist. Her 13 grandchildren surround her as she enters the house and her husband expresses his irritation that she has returned late in the evening.

Her youngest son, Wasim (20), a motor mechanic, does not know the details of Ghausia's job. "She goes to some office, is all I am aware of," he says. Shamim, her eldest, a teacher at a primary school in a nearby village, is well versed with Ghausia's job profile and says that when she started, he used to accompany her.

Shamim realises that, in a rural milieu, village elders, do not like women venturing out for such jobs. "They ask me all the time why she doesn't stay home. We know what she does but it is not easy to convince people outside about it," he says.

About his mother's desire to enter politics, he says, "To contest elections is our right. She can be in the fray. But to contest in order to win is a different game altogether. It needs muscle power and money. We lack both."

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **DANISH RAZA**

A special correspondent with Hindustan Times, Danish covers humanitarian issues with strong focus on human rights, gender, conflicts and juvenile justice. He has reported from conflict zones including the No Man's land in Indo-Bangladesh border. Trafficking of women, child trafficking are issues which he has investigated and reported on extensively. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best Investigative story

## ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಎಂಬ ಈ ಜಾಲ

Vijay Karnataka, July 29, 2013

ರೂಪ ಹಾಸನ

ಜಾನಪದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಬ್ಬಳು 'ಹೊಟ್ಟೆಯ ಈ ಕಿಚ್ಚು/ ಮುಟ್ಟಲಾಗದ ಬಿಂಕಿ/ ನನ್ನ ಸಿಬ್ಬೋಗಿ ತಟ್ಟಲ/ ಆ ಪರಶಿವನ ಮಡದಿಗೆ' ಎನ್ನುತ್ತಾಳೆ. ತನ್ನ ಅರ್ಧಂಗಿಗೇ ನೋವಾದಾಗಲಾದರೂ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಜೀವದ ಸಂಕಟವನ್ನು ಶಿವ ಅರ್ಧ ಮಾಡಿಕೊಂಡಾನೇ? ಎಂಬ ಹಲುಬುವಿಕೆ ಅವಳದ್ದು. ಹೆಂಗಳೆಯರು ನಾವಂತೂ, ನಮ್ಮದೇ ಹೆಣ್ಣು ಸಂಕುಲದ ದಾರುಣ ನೋವನ್ನು ನೋಡುವಾಗಲೆಲ್ಲಾ, ಸಂಕಟದಿಂದ 'ಅವರ ಮನೆ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳಿಗೇ ಹೀಗೆಲ್ಲ ಆಗಿದ್ದರೆ, ಹೀಗೇ ಸುಮ್ಮನೆ ಇರಿದ್ದರಾ?' ಎಂದು ಪುರುಷ ಪ್ರಭುತ್ವಕ್ಕೆ ಮನಸಿನಾಳದಲ್ಲೇ ಶಾಪ ಹಾಕುತ್ತಿರುತ್ತೇವೆ! ಆದರೆ ತನ್ನದೇ ಅರ್ಧಭಾಗವಾಗಿರುವ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಜೀವದ ನೋವನ್ನು ಅರ್ಧಮಾಡಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ, ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ತುಡಿಯುವ ಸಂವೇದನೆಯನ್ನು ನಮ್ಮ ಸುತ್ತಲಿನ ಪುರುಷ ಪ್ರಪಂಚ ರೂಢಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬಾರದೇ? ಇದು ಸದಾ ನಮ್ಮನ್ನು ಕಾಡುತ್ತಲೇ ಇದೆ.

ಹೆಣ್ಣುಜೀವದ ಮೇಲೆ ದಿನನಿತ್ಯ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿರುವ ಅತ್ಯಾಚಾರ, ದೌರ್ಜನ್ಯಗಳ ಜೊತೆಗೇ ರಾಜ್ಯದಲ್ಲ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಪ್ರಕರಣಗಳು ಆತಂಕ ಹುಟ್ಟಿಸುವಷ್ಟು ಮಿತಿಮೀರಿದೆ. ಪ್ರತಿದಿನ ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಪುಟಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಒಂದಲ್ಲಾ ಒಂದು ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಗೆ ಸಂಬಂಧಿಸಿದ ಸುದ್ದಿ ಈಗ ಮಾಮೂಲಿಯಾಗಿಬಿಟ್ಟಿದೆ. ರಾಜ್ಯದ ಪೊಲೀಸರು ಹಾಗೂ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಮತ್ತು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಕಲ್ಯಾಣ ಇಲಾಖೆ ನೀಡಿರುವ ಅಂಕಿಅಂಶಗಳ ಪ್ರಕಾರ 2009ರಿಂದ 2011ರವರೆಗೆ ದಾಖಲಾದ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು 14,989. ನಾವಿರುವ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಮರ್ಯಾದೆಗೆ ಅಂಜಿ ದಾಖಲಾಗದವು ಇದರ ದುಪ್ಪಟ್ಟೋ ಮೂರುಪಟ್ಟೋ ಇದ್ದರೂ ಅಚ್ಚರಿಪಡಬೇಕಿಲ್ಲ. ಆದರೆ ದಾಖಲಾದವುಗಳಲ್ಲೇ ಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗದೇ ಉಳಿದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು 8039! ಜೊತೆಗೆ 2012ರಲ್ಲಿ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾದವರು 8084! ಇವರೆಲ್ಲಾ ಏನಾದರು? ಎಲ್ಲ ಹೋಗುತ್ತಾರೆ? ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗುವುದು ಎಂದರೆ ಏನು? ತಾವಾಗಿಯೇ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗಿಬಿಡುತ್ತಾರೆಯೇ ಅಥವಾ ಕಾಣದ ಕೈಗಳು ಅವರನ್ನು ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಮಾಡಿಬಿಡುತ್ತವೆಯೇ? ಅವರನ್ನು ಕಾಳಜಿಯಿಂದ ಹುಡುಕುವ ಕೆಲಸವಾಗುತ್ತಿಲ್ಲ ಯಾಕೆ? ಈ ಪ್ರಮಾಣದಲ್ಲಿ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದರೂ ಅದು ನಮ್ಮ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯ ಕರುಳನ್ನು ಅಳಿದುಹೋಗಿಲ್ಲವೇಕೆ?

ಪೊಲೀಸ್ ಇಲಾಖೆ, ಮಹಿಳಾ ಮತ್ತು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಕಲ್ಯಾಣ ಇಲಾಖೆ, ರಾಜ್ಯ ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಹಕ್ಕುಗಳ ರಕ್ಷಣಾ ಆಯೋಗ, ಕಾರ್ಮಿಕ ಇಲಾಖೆ, ಮಾನವ ಹಕ್ಕುಗಳ ಆಯೋಗ, ಮಹಿಳಾ ಆಯೋಗ, ಬಾಲ ನ್ಯಾಯ ಮಂಡಳಿ, ಮಹಿಳೆ ಮತ್ತು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಪರ ಹಲವು ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಆಯೋಗಗಳು, ಸಮಿತಿಗಳು..... ಇಂತಹ ಹತ್ತು ಹಲವು ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಗಳು ಪ್ರಕರಣಗಳನ್ನು ನೇರವಾಗಿ ನಿರ್ವಹಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದರೂ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ನಿಯಂತ್ರಣಕ್ಕೆ ಬರದೇ ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಪ್ರತ್ಯೇಕವಾದ ಯಾವ ಗಂಭೀರ ಕ್ರಮವನ್ನೂ, ಕಾರ್ಯಾಯೋಜನೆಯನ್ನೂ ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳುತ್ತಿಲ್ಲವೆಂದರೆ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳನ್ನು ರಕ್ಷಿಸುವವರಾರು?

ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಕಳ್ಳನಾಗಾಣಿಕೆಯ ಹಿಂದಿರುವ ಸತ್ಯಸಂಗತಿಗಳನ್ನು ಅರಿಯಲು

ಇತ್ತೀಚೆಗೆ ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರೀಯ ಮಾನವ ಹಕ್ಕುಗಳ ಆಯೋಗ ನಡೆಸಿದ ಅಧ್ಯಯನದಿಂದ ಹಲವಾರು ಬೆಚ್ಚಿಬೀಳುವಂತಹ ಅಂಶಗಳು ಹೊರಬಿದ್ದಿವೆ. ಕಳ್ಳನಾಗಾಣಿಕೆ ಜಾಲಕ್ಕೆ ಸಿಕ್ಕಿ ವೇಶ್ಯಾವಾಟಕಿಗೆ ತಳ್ಳಲ್ಪಟ್ಟವರಲ್ಲಿ ಶೇಕಡಾ 60.6ರಷ್ಟು ಮಂದಿ ಬಾಲ್ಯವಿವಾಹವಾದವರೇ! ಕಳ್ಳನಾಗಾಣಿಕೆಯ ವ್ಯವಹಾರದಲ್ಲ ನಿರತರಾದ ದಲ್ಲಾಳಗಳು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರನ್ನು ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿ ಒಳ್ಳೆಯ ಕೆಲಸದ ಭರವಸೆ ನೀಡಿಯೇ ಬಲಪಡಿಸಿ ಮಾಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಪ್ರೀತಿ ಅಥವಾ ಮದುವೆಯ ಭರವಸೆ ನೀಡಿ ಈ ಜಾಲಕ್ಕೆ ಕೆಡಹುವುದು ಶೇಕಡಾ 20 ಮಾತ್ರ! ವಂಚನೆಗೊಳಗಾದವರಲ್ಲಿ ತಳವರ್ಗದವರೇ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿದ್ದು, ಶೇಕಡಾ 70ರಷ್ಟು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ತಳಸಮುದಾಯದವರು!

ಜಾಗತಿಕವಾಗಿ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಮತ್ತು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಮಾರಾಟದಲ್ಲ ಭಾರತವು ಪ್ರಮುಖ ತಾಣವಾಗಿದೆಯೆಂದು ವಿಶ್ವಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯ ವರದಿ ಹೇಳುತ್ತದೆ. 90ರ ದಶಕದಿಂದ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಸರ್ಕಾರಗಳು ಜಾರಿಗೊಳಿಸಿದ ಜಾಗತೀಕರಣದ ನೀತಿಗಳು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಮತ್ತು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಮಾರಾಟ ಅತಿ ಹೆಚ್ಚು ಬೆಳೆಯಲು ಕಾರಣವಾಗಿದೆ. 2010ರ ಭಾರತ ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಮತ್ತು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಕಲ್ಯಾಣ ವಿಭಾಗದ ವರದಿಯಂತೆಯೇ ಸದ್ಯ 25ಲಕ್ಷ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ವೇಶ್ಯಾವಾಟಕಿಗೆ ದೂಡಲ್ಪಟ್ಟಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಆದರೆ 'ಮಾನವ ಹಕ್ಕುಗಳ ವಾಚ್'ನ ವರದಿಯಂತೆ ಅಂದಾಜು 150ಲಕ್ಷ ಭಾರತದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳನ್ನು ವೇಶ್ಯಾವಾಟಕಿಗೆ ನೂಕಲಾಗಿದೆ! ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಅಕ್ರಮ ಮಾರಾಟವೆಂಬುದು ಈಗ ಸೀಮಿತ ಚೌಕಟ್ಟುಗಳನ್ನು ದಾಟಿ, ರಾಜ್ಯ-ಅಂತರರಾಜ್ಯ ಮಿತಿಗಳನ್ನು ಮೀರಿ ರಾಷ್ಟ್ರ ಹಾಗೂ ಜಾಗತಿಕ ವಿದ್ಯಮಾನವಾಗಿ ಸದ್ದಿಲ್ಲದೇ ಬೆಳೆದು ನಿಂತಿದೆ. ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ವೇಶ್ಯಾವಾಟಕಿಯ ಅಡ್ಡಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸಿಕ್ಕಿದರೂ ಇದರ ಹಿಂದಿರುವ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಿತವಾದ ಅಕ್ರಮ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಸಾಗಾಣಿಕಾ ಜಾಲವನ್ನು ಭೇದಿಸಲು ಯಾಕೆ ಸಾಧ್ಯವಾಗುತ್ತಿಲ್ಲ? ಎಲ್ಲವೂ ಗೊತ್ತಿದ್ದೂ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳನ್ನು ಹುಡುಕುವ, ರಕ್ಷಿಸುವ, ಮತ್ತೆ ಅವರನ್ನು ಯಥಾಸ್ಥಿತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಉಳಿಸುವ ಕಣ್ಣಾಮುಚ್ಚಿ ನಾಟಕವನ್ನು ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ಉದ್ದೇಶಪೂರ್ವಕವಾಗಿಯೇ ಆಡುತ್ತಿದೆಯೇ? ಹೆಣ್ಣಿನ ದೇಹವನ್ನು ವಸ್ತುವನ್ನಾಗಿ ಸಿಕ್ಕೊಂಡು ವ್ಯಾಪಾರದ ಆಟವಾಡುತ್ತಿರುವವರಿಗೆ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳೇ ಬಂಡವಾಳ ಹೂಡಿಕೆಯಾಗಿ ಬಳಕೆಯಾಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಅದರಿಂದ ಕೋಟಿಗಟ್ಟಲೆ ಆದಾಯ ದೊರಕುತ್ತಿದೆ! ಇದು ಕೇವಲ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಹಕ್ಕಿನ ವಿಷಯವಲ್ಲ, ಮನುಷ್ಯತ್ವದ ಕಟ್ಟಕಡೆಯ ಮಜಲು ಎಂದು ಸರ್ಕಾರಕ್ಕೆ ಹೃದಯ ಧ್ವವಿಸುವಂತೆ ಹೇಗೆ ಅರ್ಥಮಾಡಿಸುವುದು?

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲ ಇತ್ತೀಚಿನ 4-5 ವರ್ಷಗಳಿಂದ ಲೈಂಗಿಕವೃತ್ತಿನಿರತರನ್ನು ಪ್ರತಿ ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಆರೋಗ್ಯ ಕೇಂದ್ರಗಳಲ್ಲೂ ಅವರಿಗೆ 'ಸುರಕ್ಷಿತ ಲೈಂಗಿಕತೆ'ಯನ್ನು ಕಲಿಸಲೆಂದೇ ದಾಖಲಿಸುವುದು ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಿತವಾಗಿ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿದೆ! ಇವರಲ್ಲಿ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನವರು ಬಡ ಕುಟುಂಬಗಳಿಂದ ಬಂದವರು. 'ನಮ್ಮ ಆರ್ಥಿಕ ಅವಶ್ಯಕತೆಗಳು ಬೇರೆ ರೀತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಪೂರೈಕೆಯಾದರೆ ನಾವು ಖಂಡಿತಾ ಈ ವೃತ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಬಿಡುತ್ತೇವೆ' ಎನ್ನುತ್ತಾರವರು. ಈ ದಾಖಲೆಗೆ ಒಳಪಡದ ಇನ್ನೂ ಬೃಹತ್ ಮೊತ್ತ ಹೊರಗೇ ಇರುವುದೂ ನಿವಿವಾದ. ದಾಖಲಾದವರು ಬಡತನದ ದಳ್ಳುರಿಗೆ, ಆಕಸ್ಮಿಕಕ್ಕೆ, ಮೋಸಕ್ಕೆ, ವಂಚನೆಯ ಜಾಲಕ್ಕೆ ಸಿಕ್ಕಿ ಈ ವೃತ್ತಿಗಿಳಿದಿದ್ದಾರೆಯೇ ಹೊರತು, 'ವೇಶ್ಯಾವಾಟಕಿ ಅವರ ಆಯ್ಕೆ ಅಲ್ಲ' ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಸಮಾಜ ಗಂಭೀರವಾಗಿ ಪರಿಗಣಿಸಬೇಕು. ಹಾಗಿದ್ದರೆ ಅವರನ್ನು ಈ ವೃತ್ತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ಅಸಹಾಯಕರಾಗಿ ತೊಡಗಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವಂತೆ ಮಾಡಿರುವ ನಮ್ಮ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ರೋಗಗ್ರಸ್ತವಾದುದೆನ್ನದೇ ಬೇರೇನೆನ್ನೋಣ?

ಈ ಲೈಂಗಿಕವೃತ್ತಿನಿರತರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ ವರ್ಷದಿಂದ ವರ್ಷಕ್ಕೆ ಮಿತಿಮೀರಿದ ಪ್ರಮಾಣದಲ್ಲ ಏರುತ್ತಿದ್ದು, ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಪ್ರಕರಣಗಳಿಗೂ ಇವರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆಯ ಹೆಚ್ಚಳಕ್ಕೂ ಖಂಡಿತಾ ನೇರವಾದ ಸಮೀಕರಣವಿದೆಯೆಂಬುದು ಗುಟ್ಟಿನಲ್ಲ! ಬಡ ಕುಟುಂಬಗಳ ವಲಸೆಯು ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಸುರಕ್ಷತೆಯ ದೃಷ್ಟಿಯಿಂದ ಅಪಾಯಕಾರಿಯಾಗಿದ್ದು ಆ ಸಂದರ್ಭದಲ್ಲೇ ಅನೇಕ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ದೌರ್ಜನ್ಯಕ್ಕೆ, ಅತ್ಯಾಚಾರಕ್ಕೆ, ಕದ್ದೊಯ್ಯುವಿಕೆಗೆ ತುತ್ತಾಗುತ್ತಿರುವುದು ಬೆಳಕಿಗೆ ಬಂದಿದೆ. ಇದನ್ನು ಪೋಲೀಸರಲ್ಲ ದಾಖಲಿಸುವದಕ್ಕಾಗಲ, ಕಾನೂನುರೀತ್ಯ ಹೋರಾಟ ಮಾಡಲಾಗಲ ಇವರಿಗೆ ವ್ಯವಧಾನವೂ ಇಲ್ಲ, ತಿಳಿವಳಿಕೆಯೂ ಇಲ್ಲ! ಜೊತೆಗೆ ಆರ್ಥಿಕ ಸಬಲತೆಯೂ ಇಲ್ಲ. ಹಾಗೇ ಬಾಲ್ಯವಿವಾಹವೂ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಮಾರಾಟಕ್ಕೆ ಮುಖ್ಯ ಕಾರಣವಾಗಿರುವುದು ಇನ್ನೊಂದು ದುರಂತ. ಬಾಲ್ಯವಿವಾಹ ರಾಜ್ಯದ ಬಜಾಪುರ, ರಾಯಚೂರು, ಚಿತ್ರದುರ್ಗ, ಬಾಗಲಕೋಟೆ, ಕೊಪ್ಪಳ, ಹಾವೇರಿಗಳಲ್ಲ ಇಂದಿಗೂ ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿರುವುದು ಆತಂಕಕಾರಿಯಾಗಿದೆ.

ಇದರ ಜೊತೆಯೇ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲ ಹೆಚ್ಚುತ್ತಿರುವ ಇನ್ನೊಂದು ಕ್ರೂರ ಪದ್ಧತಿ 'ವಧು ಮಾರಾಟ'! 'ಗುಜ್ಜರ್ ಮದುವೆ' ಹೆಸರಿನ ಈ ಹಣದ ಒಪ್ಪಂದದ ಮದುವೆ ಕಳೆದ 10-12ವರ್ಷಗಳಿಂದ ಧಾರವಾಡ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಯಲ್ಲ ವ್ಯಾಪಕವಾಗಿದ್ದು, ಈಗ ಬೆಳಗಾಂ ಹಾಗೂ ಕೊಪ್ಪಳ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಗಳಿಗೂ ಹಬ್ಬ, ಉತ್ತರ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕಕ್ಕೆ ರೋಗದಂತೆ ವ್ಯಾಪಿಸಿಕೊಳ್ಳುತ್ತಿದೆ. ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಪೋಷಕರ ಬಡತನ, ಅಜ್ಞಾನವೇ ಇದಕ್ಕೆ ಬಂಡವಾಳ. ಹೆಣ್ಣು ಇಲ್ಲ ಕೇವಲ ಮಾರಾಟದ ಸರಕು! ಮದುವೆಯ ನಂತರ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಸುಖಸಂಸಾರ ನಡೆಸುವರೆಂಬ ಕನಸನ್ನು ಮಧ್ಯವರ್ತಿಗಳು ಪೋಷಕರಲ್ಲ ಬಿತ್ತಿ, ಕೇವಲ ಕೆಲವೇ ಸಾವಿರಕ್ಕೆ ಅವರನ್ನು ಕೊಂಡುಕೊಂಡು ಅವರನ್ನು ದೂರದ ರಾಜಸ್ಥಾನ, ಹರಿಯಾಣ, ಗುಜರಾತ್, ಉತ್ತರಪ್ರದೇಶ, ಮಹಾರಾಷ್ಟ್ರದ ಯಾವನೋ ಒಬ್ಬನೊಂದಿಗೆ ವಿವಾಹ ಮಾಡಿಸುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಈ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ರಾಜ್ಯಗಳಲ್ಲ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಪ್ರಮಾಣ ಪುರುಷರಿಗೆ ಹೋಲಿಸಿದರೆ, ಆಘಾತ ಹುಟ್ಟಿಸುವಷ್ಟು ಕಡಿಮೆ ಪ್ರಮಾಣದಲ್ಲಿದೆ ಎಂಬುದು ಗಮನಿಸಬೇಕಾದ ಅಂಶವಾಗಿದೆ. ವಿವಾಹದ ಸೋಲಿನಲ್ಲ ಇಂತಹ ಅಪರಾಧಗಳು ಪೋಷಕರು, ಮದುವೆ ದಲ್ಲಾಳಗಳು, ವಧು ಮಾರಾಟದ ಏಜೆಂಟರ ಸಂಘಟಿತ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನದಿಂದ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿವೆ. ಹೀಗೆ ಮದುವೆ ಮಾಡಿಕೊಂಡು ಹೋದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಗಳು ಆ ಕುಟುಂಬದ ಎಲ್ಲ ಪುರುಷರ ಕಾಮಕ್ಕೆ ಬಲಪಶುವಾಗುತ್ತಾಳೆ. ಅಲ್ಲ, ಹಗಲು ಹೊಲಗಳಲ್ಲ ದುಡಿತ ರಾತ್ರಿ ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ಜೀತದಾಳಾಗಿ ಬಳಕೆ. ಇಲ್ಲದಿದ್ದರೆ ಮತ್ತೆ ಮಾರಾಟ. ಇಲ್ಲ ತಮ್ಮ ಅಸ್ತಿತ್ವದ ಅರಿವಿಲ್ಲದ, ಹೆಸರಿಲ್ಲದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಗಳ ಕೊಂಡುಕೊಳ್ಳುವಿಕೆ, ಮಾರಾಟ, ಮರು ಮಾರಾಟವನ್ನು ಯಾವುದೇ ಎಗ್ಗಿಲ್ಲದೇ, ತರಕಾರಿ ವ್ಯಾಪಾರದಂತೆ ನಡೆಸಲಾಗುತ್ತದೆ ಎಂದರೆ, ನಾವು ನಾಗರೀಕ ಜಗತ್ತಿನಲ್ಲ ಬದುಕುತ್ತಿದ್ದೇವೆಯೇ? -ಕರುಳು ಚೀರಿ ಕೇಳುತ್ತದೆ.

ಇದಕ್ಕೆ ಮೂಲ ಮುಖ್ಯ ಕಾರಣ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಭ್ರೂಣ ಹತ್ಯೆ. ಇದರಿಂದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಗಳ ಪ್ರಮಾಣ ಗಣನೀಯವಾಗಿ ಕಡಿಮೆಯಾಗುತ್ತಾ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ 'ಕೊರತೆ'ಯೇ ಇಂತಹಾ ದಾರುಣವಾದ ಪರಿಸ್ಥಿತಿಗೆ ದೂಡಿದೆ. ಹೀಗೇ ಮುಂದುವರೆದರೆ, ಸಮಾಜದಲ್ಲ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಸ್ಥಿತಿ ಮತ್ತೆಷ್ಟು ಭೀಕರವಾಗುತ್ತದೆಯೋ, ಪುರುಷರು ಅದೆಷ್ಟು ವಿಕೃತಗೊಳ್ಳುತ್ತಾರೋ ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ನೆನೆದೇ ಮನಸು ತಲ್ಲಣಿಸಿಹೋಗುತ್ತದೆ.

ಕಳೆದ 2012ರಲ್ಲ ಮೈಸೂರು ವಿಶ್ವವಿದ್ಯಾಲಯದ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಒಳಗೊಳ್ಳುವಿಕೆಯ

ಅಧ್ಯಯನ ತಂಡ ಮಾಡಿರುವ ಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆಯ ಪ್ರಕಾರ ಪ್ರತಿ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಒಂದು ವರ್ಷಕ್ಕೆ ಸರಾಸರಿ 200-300 ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಕಾಣೆಯಾಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಇದರಲ್ಲಿ ಶೇಕಡಾ 70ರಷ್ಟು ಇನ್ನೂ ಬಾಲ್ಯದಾಟದವರು ಎನ್ನುವುದು ಆತಂಕಕಾರಿಯಾಗಿದೆ. ರಾಜ್ಯ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಆಯೋಗವೂ ಕಳೆದ ವರ್ಷ ಈ ವರದಿಯನ್ನಾಧರಿಸಿ- ಶೇಕಡಾ 36ರಷ್ಟು ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಪ್ರೀತಿ, ಪ್ರೇಮ ಪ್ರಕರಣಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ ಓಡಿ ಹೋಗುತ್ತಾರೆ ಎಂದು ಒತ್ತಿ ಹೇಳಿದೆ. ಹಾಗಿದ್ದರೆ ಅವರೊಂದಿಗೆ ಇಷ್ಟೇ ಪ್ರಮಾಣದ ವಯಸ್ಸು ಪುರುಷರೂ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗಬೇಕಿತ್ತಲ್ಲ? ಈ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಬೇರೆ ಬೇರೆ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆಗಳ ಪೊಲೀಸ್ ಇಲಾಖೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ದಾಖಲಾದ ಪ್ರಕರಣಗಳನ್ನು ಅಭ್ಯಸಿಸಿದಾಗ ಹಾಗೆ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾದ ಪುರುಷರ ಪ್ರಮಾಣ ಶೇಕಡಾ 5ರೊಳಗೇ ಇದೆ! ಇದರಲ್ಲೂ ಪ್ರೀತಿ ಪ್ರೇಮಕ್ಕಿಂತಾ ಬೇರೆ ವೈಯಕ್ತಿಕ ಕಾರಣಗಳೇ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾಗಿವೆ. ಹಾಗಿದ್ದರೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಯಾರನ್ನು ಪ್ರೀತಿಸಿ ಓಡಿ ಹೋಗುತ್ತಿದ್ದಾರೆ? ನಮ್ಮ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳೇನು ಮೀರಾ, ಅಕ್ಕಮಹಾದೇವಿ, ಆಂಡಾಳ್‌ರಂತೆ ಸಂತಭಕ್ತೆಯರೇ? ಇದು ಏನನ್ನು ಸೂಚಿಸುತ್ತದೆ? ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಿತವಾದ ಮಾರಾಟ ಜಾಲವನ್ನು ನಿಗೂಢ ಕೈಗಳು ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಿತವಾಗಿ ನಿರಾತಂಕವಾಗಿ ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿವೆ ಎಂದಲ್ಲವೇ? ಪ್ರೀತಿಸಿ ಮನೆ ಬಿಟ್ಟು ಹೋಗುತ್ತಿರುವ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಇಲ್ಲವೇ ಇಲ್ಲವೆಂದಲ್ಲ. ಆದರೆ ಪ್ರೀತಿಯ ಹಿಂದೆ ಬಿದ್ದು ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಕಣ್ಮರೆಯಾಗಿದ್ದರೆ ಅವರನ್ನು ಪತ್ತೆ ಹಚ್ಚುವುದು ಕಷ್ಟವಾದರೂ ಸಾಧ್ಯ. ಆದ್ದರಿಂದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಶಾಶ್ವತವಾಗಿ ಕಾಣೆಯಾಗುವುದರ ಹಿಂದೆ ಮೋಸದ ಮಾಯಾ ಜಾಲ ಹರಡಿ ನಿಂತಿರುತ್ತದೆ ಎಂಬುದನ್ನು ಯಾರಾದರೂ ಅರ್ಥಮಾಡಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬಲ್ಲರಲ್ಲವೇ?

ಈ ಹಿನ್ನೆಲೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಮಹಿಳೆ ಮತ್ತು ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಅಕ್ರಮ ಸಾಗಣೆಯೆಂಬ ಕ್ರೂರ ವ್ಯವಹಾರ ನಿಯಂತ್ರಣಕ್ಕೆ ಇನ್ನಾದರೂ ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಉನ್ನತ ಹಂತದಲ್ಲ ಸಮಗ್ರವಾದ ಕಾರ್ಯಯೋಜನೆ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ತುರ್ತಾಗಿ ಆಗಬೇಕಿದೆ. ಇದಕ್ಕೆ ಸಂಬಂಧಿತವಾದ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಇಲಾಖೆಗಳು, ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಸಮಿತಿಗಳೂ ಹಾಗೂ ಸ್ವಯಂಸೇವಾ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಗಳು ಸಂಘಟಿತವಾಗಿ, ಪರಸ್ಪರ ಪೂರಕವಾಗಿ ಈ ಕೆಲಸದಲ್ಲ ತೊಡಗಿಕೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕಿದೆ. ಈ ವಿಷಯದ ಗಂಭೀರತೆಗೆ ತಕ್ಕ ಸಶಕ್ತವಾದ ಕಾನೂನುಗಳು ಇಲ್ಲದಿರುವುದು, ಇದ್ದರೂ ಅದರೊಳಗಿನ ನುಸುಳುಗಳು ಜತೆಗೆ ನ್ಯಾಯದಾನದ ವಿಳಂಬ ಹಾಗೂ ಕಾನೂನು ಜಾರಿಯಲ್ಲೂ ವಿಳಂಬ, ಹೀಗಾಗಿ ಈ ಅಕ್ರಮ ವ್ಯವಹಾರ ಎಲ್ಲಿಂದಲೂ ನಡೆಯುತ್ತಿವೆ. ಅದಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ತ್ವರಿತಗತಿಯ ನ್ಯಾಯಾಲಯಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ತಕ್ಷಣವೇ ನ್ಯಾಯ ನೀಡುವ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯಾಗಬೇಕು. ಜೊತೆಗೇ ಇಂದಿನ ಅವಶ್ಯಕತೆಗನುಗುಣವಾಗಿ ಕಾನೂನು ತಿದ್ದುಪಡಿಯೂ ಆಗಬೇಕಿದೆ.

30ಮೇ 2005ರಲ್ಲಿ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರದಿಂದ, ಪ್ರತಿ ಜಿಲ್ಲೆ, ತಾಲ್ಲೂಕು ಹಾಗೂ ಗ್ರಾಮ ಪಂಚಾಯತಿಗಳಲ್ಲಿ 'ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಮಾರಾಟ ತಡೆ' ಸಮಿತಿಗಳನ್ನು ರಚಿಸಲು ಆದೇಶ ಜಾರಿಯಾಯ್ತು. ಅದು ಯಶಸ್ವಿಯಾಗಿ ಜಾರಿಯಾಗಲಿಲ್ಲವೆಂದು ಮತ್ತೆ 28ಮೇ 2007ರಲ್ಲಿ, ಚುನಾಯಿತ ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಗಳ ಮುಖಂಡತ್ವದಲ್ಲ ಈ ಸಮಿತಿಗಳನ್ನು ಪುನರ್ ರಚನೆಬೇಕೆಂಬ ಆದೇಶ ಜಾರಿಯಾಗಿದೆ. ಪ್ರತಿ ಮೂರು ತಿಂಗಳಿಗೊಮ್ಮೆ ಈ ಸಮಿತಿಯ ಸಭೆ ಸೇರಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಯೋಜನೆಯ ಸಿದ್ಧತೆ ಹಾಗೂ ಆದ ಕೆಲಸಗಳ ಪರಾಮರ್ಶೆ ಮಾಡಬೇಕೆಂದು ಆದೇಶದಲ್ಲ ಒತ್ತಿಹೇಳಲಾಗಿತ್ತು. ಆದರೆ ಬಹಳಷ್ಟು ಕಡೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಇಂತಹ ಸಮಿತಿ ರೂಪುಗೊಂಡಿಲ್ಲ. ರೂಪುಗೊಂಡ ಸಮಿತಿಗಳು ಸರಿಯಾಗಿ ಕೆಲಸ ನಿರ್ವಹಿಸುತ್ತಿಲ್ಲವೆಂಬುದು ದುಃಖಕರ. ರಾಜ್ಯದಲ್ಲ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ

ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಪ್ರಕರಣದ ತೀವ್ರತೆಯನ್ನು ಗಮನಿಸಿ ತಕ್ಷಣದ ಕಾರ್ಯಾಚರಣೆಗಾಗಿ ಪೊಲೀಸ್ ಅಧಿಕಾರಿಗಳನ್ನೂ ಒಳಗೊಳ್ಳುವಂತೆ ಇದೇ ಸಮಿತಿಯನ್ನು ಪುನರ್ ಪ್ರಾರಂಭಿಸಿ ಕಟ್ಟುನಿಟ್ಟಿನ ಕ್ರಮ ಕೈಗೊಳ್ಳಬೇಕಿರುವುದು ಸದ್ಯದ ತುರ್ತಾಗಿದೆ. ಪೊಲೀಸ್ ಇಲಾಖೆಯಲ್ಲೇ ಇಂತಹ ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಪ್ರಕರಣಗಳನ್ನು ಶೀಘ್ರವಾಗಿ ವ್ಯವಹರಿಸಲು ಪ್ರತ್ಯೇಕ ಸೆಲ್ ಒಂದನ್ನು ರಚಿಸುವ ತುರ್ತು ಕೂಡ ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿದೆ. ಈ ಕುರಿತು ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಉನ್ನತಮಟ್ಟದಲ್ಲಿ ಕಾರ್ಯೋದ್ದೇಶವೊಂದು ರೂಪುಗೊಂಡು, ಅದರ ಅನುಷ್ಠಾನಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಬಗಿ ಕ್ರಮಗಳನ್ನು ಜಾರಿಗೊಳಿಸಬೇಕು. ಇದರ ಜೊತೆಗೇ ಹದಿಹರಿಯದ ಗಂಡು ಮತ್ತು ಹೆಣ್ಣು ಮಕ್ಕಳಬ್ಬರಿಗೂ ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ಶಿಕ್ಷಣ ಮತ್ತು ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ಬದುಕಿನ ನೈತಿಕ ಜವಾಬ್ದಾರಿ, ಜೀವನ ಕೌಶಲ್ಯಗಳ ಕುರಿತು ತರಬೇತಿ, ಮಾನವ ಕಳ್ಳನಾಗಾಣಿಕೆಯ ಕುರಿತು ಜಾಗೃತಿ ಕಾರ್ಯಕ್ರಮಗಳನ್ನು ಆಯೋಜಿಸುವುದೂ ಅಷ್ಟೇ ಮುಖ್ಯವಾಗಿದೆ.

ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗಿ ಮತ್ತೆ ಪತ್ತೆಯಾದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳಿಗೆ ಗೌರವಯುತ ಪುನರ್ವಸತಿ ನಿರ್ಮಿಸುವ ಕುರಿತು ಸರ್ಕಾರ ವಿಶೇಷವಾಗಿಯೇ ಯೋಚಿಸಬೇಕಿದೆ. ಅವರು ಮತ್ತೆ ಇಂತಹ ಅಕ್ರಮ ಮಾರಾಟ ಜಾಲಕ್ಕೆ ಬೀಳದಂತೆ ತಡೆಯುವ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನಗಳೂ ಆಗಬೇಕಿದೆ. ವಾಪಸಾದ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳು ಹೇಗೆ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾದರು? ಇಷ್ಟು ಕಾಲ ಎಲ್ಲಿದ್ದರು? ಯಾವ ಕೆಲಸದಲ್ಲಿದ್ದರು? ಅಲ್ಲಿನ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆ ಮತ್ತು ವ್ಯವಹಾರಗಳು ಯಾವ ರೀತಿಯದಾಗಿತ್ತು ಎಂಬುದರ ಕೂಲಂಕಷ ಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆಗಳಾಗಿ ಅದರ ಆಧಾರದ ಮೇಲೆ ಕಾರ್ಯೋದ್ದೇಶವನ್ನು ಸಿದ್ಧಗೊಳಿಸಬೇಕು. ಇಂತಹ ಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆಯಿಂದ ಮಾತ್ರ ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಹಿಂದಿರುವ ವೈಯಕ್ತಿಕ ಕಾರಣಗಳು, ಕೌಟುಂಬಿಕ, ಆರ್ಥಿಕ, ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಕಾರಣಗಳು ಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗಿ ಅವುಗಳನ್ನು ಸರಿಯಾದ ರೀತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ವಿಂಗಡಿಸಲು ಹಾಗೂ ಕ್ರಮ ಕೈಗೊಳ್ಳಲು ಸಹಾಯಕವಾಗುತ್ತವೆ. ಇಲ್ಲ ನಮಗೆ ಬೇಕಾಗಿರುವುದು, ಬೇಡುತ್ತಿರುವುದು-ನಮ್ಮ ಮನೆಯ ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳೇ ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗಿದ್ದರೆ..... ಎಷ್ಟು ತೀವ್ರವಾಗಿ ಸ್ಪಂದಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದೆವೋ, ಅಂತಹುದೇ ತೀವ್ರತೆಯನ್ನು ಪ್ರಭುತ್ವದಿಂದಲೂ, ಆಡಳಿತಶಾಹಿಯಿಂದಲೂ ನಾವು ನಿರೀಕ್ಷಿಸಬಹುದೇ?

ಬಾಕ್ಸ್ ಐಟಮ್

ಕಣ್ಣರಿಯ ಹಿಂದೇನಿದೆ?

ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ನಾಪತ್ತೆ ಹಿಂದೆ ಯಾವ ಅಂಶಗಳು ಕೆಲಸ ಮಾಡುತ್ತವೆ ಎಂಬುದಕ್ಕೆ ಸಮಾಜ ವಿಜ್ಞಾನಿಗಳು ಹೀಗೆ ಉತ್ತರಿಸುತ್ತಾರೆ. ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ಸಂಬಂಧಗಳಿಂದ ಮೋಸ ಹೋದವರು, ಇಷ್ಟವಿಲ್ಲದ ಮದುವೆಯಾದವರು, ಭವಿಷ್ಯದ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಅಪರಿಮಿತ ಕನಸುಗಳಿರುವವರು, ಉತ್ತಮ ಜೀವನದ ಆಮಿಷಕ್ಕೆ ಒಳಗಾಗುವವರು, ಮುಗ್ಧರು, ಬಡತನದ ಬೆಗೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ನರಳುತ್ತಿರುವವರು, ಅಲ್ಪ ವಿದ್ಯಾಭ್ಯಾಸ ಪಡೆದಿರುವವರು, ಪ್ರೀತಿ-ಪ್ರೇಮಕ್ಕೆ ಸಿಲುಕಿದವರು, ಕೌಟುಂಬಿಕ ದೌರ್ಜನ್ಯದಿಂದ ನರಳುತ್ತಿರುವವರು, ಮಾಧ್ಯಮಗಳ ಪ್ರಭಾವಕ್ಕೆ ಒಳಗಾದವರು ನಾಪತ್ತೆಯಾಗುವ ಸಾಧ್ಯತೆಗಳು ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿದ್ದು, ಇವರನ್ನು ಬೇರೆ ಬೇರೆ ಆಮಿಷ ತೋರಿಸಿ, ಹೆದರಿಸಿ ಸಾಗಿಸುವುದು ಅಥವಾ ಕದ್ದೊಯ್ಯುವುದು ಸುಲಭವಾಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ. ಬಡತನ, ಅಜ್ಞಾನ, ನಗರೀಕರಣ, ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣ ಪ್ರದೇಶದಿಂದ ವಲಸೆ, ಉದ್ಯೋಗದ ಹುಡುಕಾಟ, ಪ್ರವಾಸೋದ್ಯಮ ಮತ್ತು ಮನರಂಜನಾ ಕ್ಷೇತ್ರದಲ್ಲಿನ ಕ್ಷಿಪ್ರ ಬೆಳವಣಿಗೆಗಳು ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಕಣ್ಣರಿಯ



ಹಿಂದೆ ಕೆಲಸ ಮಾಡುತ್ತಿರುವುದು ಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆಗಳಿಂದಲೂ ಸಾಬೀತಾಗಿದೆ.

ಮೂರನೇ ದೊಡ್ಡ ವಹಿವಾಟು

ನಮ್ಮ ದೇಶದಲ್ಲಿ ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ವೃತ್ತಿಯಲ್ಲಿ ತೊಡಗಿರುವವರೆಲ್ಲರ ಒಟ್ಟು ಆದಾಯ ವರ್ಷಕ್ಕೆ 40,000 ಕೋಟಿಗಳು! ದೇಶದ ಮೂರನೇ ದೊಡ್ಡ ವಹಿವಾಟು ಈ ವೃತ್ತಿಯದೇ ಎಂದು ಇತ್ತೀಚಿನ ವರದಿ ಹೇಳುತ್ತದೆ. ಹಾಗೇ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಹಾಗೂ ಮಕ್ಕಳ ಸಾಗಾಣಿಕೆ ದೇಶದ ಮೂರನೇ ಅತಿ ಬೃಹತ್ ಉದ್ಯಮವಾಗಿದೆ!

ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ದಂಧೆಯ ನಾನಾ ರೂಪ

ಮಾನವ ಅಕ್ರಮ ಸಾಗಾಣಿಕೆ ಇಂದು ಒಂದು ದೊಡ್ಡ ಮಾಫಿಯಾ ಆಗಿ ಬೆಳೆದು ನಿಂತಿದೆ. ಹೆಣ್ಣುಮಕ್ಕಳ ಮಾರಾಟದಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಮುಖ ಪಾತ್ರವನ್ನು ಕರ್ನಾಟಕವಹಿಸಿದೆ. ಒಂದು ಮಾಹಿತಿಯಂತೆ ಸದ್ಯ ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದಲ್ಲಿ 2,50,000 ಲೈಂಗಿಕ ಕಾರ್ಯಕರ್ತೆಯರಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಮುಂಬೈನ ಕೆಂಪು ದೀಪ ಪ್ರದೇಶದಲ್ಲಿ ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆಯಲ್ಲಿರುವುದು ಕರ್ನಾಟಕದ ಯುವತಿಯರು ಎಂದು ಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆಯೊಂದು ಹೇಳುತ್ತದೆ.

ಗಾಬರಿ ಹುಟ್ಟಿಸುವ ಅಂಕಿ ಅಂಶ

ವರ್ಷ	ಕಾಣೆಯಾದವರು	ಪತ್ತೆಯಾದವರು	ಪತ್ತೆ ಇಲ್ಲದವರು
2009	4720	2247(47.61)	2473
2010	6005	2960 (46.29)	3045
2011	4264	1743 (40.88)	2521
	14989	6950	8039



#### ROOPA HASSAN

Roopa Hassan, who works in print media, is a poet, social activist, social worker. She has been championing the cause of poor and downtrodden by conducting workshops on social issues. Her fights for justice for rape survivors, children and women rights, are well recognized. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best Feature



# কঠিন সফরে নুরেরা যুদ্ধজয়েরই পথিকৃত

El Samay May 17, 2016

লেডি উইথ দ্য ল্যান্স। অর্থাৎ আলো হবে যিনি পথ দেখান। রাতের অন্ধকারেও তিনি ঠাণ্ডা হীন ভাবে আহত সেনাদের সেবা করতেন, যখন অঘোর ঘুমে আচ্ছন্ন থাকত বিশ্ব। সেখান থেকেই আধুনিক নার্সিংয়ের প্রতিষ্ঠাতা স্লেয়ারেন্স নাইটিংগেলের এই নাম। আর তাঁর দেখালা সেই পথেই চলতে চায় নূর। জীবনের দু'-দুটো কঠিন যুদ্ধ জিতে ফেলার ও পারে উভসাহী সেই কঠিন যখন বলে ওঠে, 'নার্স হব। জা হলেই মানুষের সেবা করা হবে। সবার পাশে থাকতে পারব', তখন মনে হয়, এমন নুরেরাই তো কন্যাগ্ৰী। বা সুহানা যখন বলে, সে পুলিশ হতে চায় মানুষের পাশে দাঁড়ানোর জন্য, তখন বেজে ওঠে, 'তোমারই হোক জয়া।' নূর হোক বা সুহানা, কোনওটাই এই ১৬-১৭ বছরের মেয়েদের আসল নাম নয়। ওদের পরিচয়টা দেওয়া যাবে না। কারণ দেশের আইন নির্দিষ্ট করে বলে দিয়েছে, 'পাচারের শিকার কোনও ব্যক্তির সামান্যতুক পরিচয়ও দেওয়া যাবে না। তাতে সেই ব্যক্তির জীবনে নানা সমস্যা হতে পারে।' ভারতীয় সমাজ এমনই। নারী ধর্মিত হোক বা পাচার হোক বা বৌন পরিতে কাজ করুক, অপরাধটা যেন তাঁরই। সেটা তিন বছর আগের কথা। মাধ্যমিক পরীক্ষা শুরু হবার দিন কয়েক আগে। বাবার কাছে পড়ছিল নূর। অন্যান্য দিনের মতো সে দিনও বাড়ির কাছেই স্কুলের মাঠে ঘুরে আসত গিয়েছিল, একঘেয়েমি কাটতে। আশপাশে কেউ ছিল না। সূর্য সে দিনের মতো বিদায় নিয়েছে। হযতো বা নূরের জীবনের আলোও। ঠিক যে ভাবে এক পরিচিত ছোকরার পালায় পড়ে হারিয়ে গিয়েছিল সুহানা। নূর বলছিল, 'হঠাতই দেখলাম দুটো লোক ঘোরামুরি করছে। ভার পর একজন আমার পাশে এসে দাঁড়াল। আর অন্য জন নাকে রুমাল চেপে ধরল। আর কিছুমলে বেই।' পুলিশের তথ্য বলছে, নয় অচেতন করে তা না হলে প্রেমের ফাঁদে বা কাজের টোপে এ ভাবেই মেয়েরা পাচার হয়ে যায়। ভার পরের ঘটনাটাও চেনা। নূরের ঘুম ভেঙেছিল যখন, সে তখন টেলে বসে। সঙ্গে ওই দুটো লোক। কোথায় যাচ্ছে, কেন যাচ্ছে, কার সঙ্গে যাচ্ছে - কিছুই বুঝতে পারেনি সে। কারণ তখনও ঘোর কাটেনি। বলল, 'কোনও কথাই আমার ঠিকঠাক মনে পড়ছিল না। ঘুম পাচ্ছিল।' আর সুহানা জানায়, একটি ছেলে তাকে মাঝে মাঝেই ফোন করত। সে আপত্তি জানাত। হঠাতই এক দিন ভার স্কুলের সামনে হাজির হয়। কিছুকাল ওঠার আগেই বড় একটা গাড়িতে তুলে নিয়েছিল তাকে। ভার পর যখন জ্ঞান ফেরে, তখন ও টেনে। দুটো টেনই দিলি পৌঁছয়। আর দু'জনেরই ঠিকানা হয় জি বি রোডে। যেখানে দিনের আলোয় লোহা-লঙ্কড়ের কেনাবেচা হয়, আর রাতে শরীরের। কমলা নগর থেকে ডিল ঘোড়া দুজনে সেই বৌনপরিতে নূরের জীবনে অমাবস্যার অন্ধকার। আকা-আগ্নির আদর থেকে, বাড়ি-স্কুলের একটা পরিবেশ থেকে অন্ধকার কুঠুরিতে বন্দি। সঙ্গে মাসিদের শাসানি। খন্ডের সামনে আসতে হবেই। নূর-সুহানা ভয় পায়নি। সাহসে বুক বেঁধে মুক্তির আশায় ছিল তারা। সে মুক্তি এল। এ বছর নূর যখন মাদ্রাসা (আলিম) পাশ করল। আর সুহানা মাধ্যমিক। মারকাটারি নথর তারা পায়নি, কিন্তু এই নথরের পিছনের ইতিহাসটা যে খুব কঠিন। এখানেই নূরের সাক্ষ্য। বলছে, 'দিদি, রেজাল্ট যখন বেরোল, ভাবতে পারিনি পাশ করেছি। আকা বলল, পড়বি, আরও পড়বি। তোকে আমি পড়াশোনা করাব। কী বে আনন্দ হয়েছিল।' চোখের জল বে তখন গাল বেয়ে অঝোর ধারায় নেমে আসছে তা বলার অপেক্ষা রাখে না। আর মা? 'জানো তো, আমার মা অসুস্থ। আমি যখন তিন বছর আগে হারিয়ে গিয়েছিলাম, মা সারা দিন কাঁদত। যা হতাশ করত। তেমন করতে করতেই এক দিন স্তৌক হল। ভার পর থেকে আমি বিছানার। কিন্তু খু-উ-ব খুশি।' আর সুহানা বলল, 'আমার সঙ্গে আরও পটা মেয়েও উদ্ধার হয়। একজন বাদে ওরা ওখানেই থেকে গেল। এল না। আমি পরীক্ষা দিলাম, পাশ করলাম। এর থেকে বড় আনন্দ আর কী হবে! বাবা মুঠের কাজ করে সংসার চালায়, তাকে বাতে সাহায্য করতে পারি সে জন্য কাজ করব।' দিল্লির জি বি রোড থেকে দক্ষিণ চব্বিশ পরগনার মাদ্রাসা স্কুলে ফেরত আসাটা খুব সহজ ছিল না। বলা যায়, চেনা ঘকের বাইরে গিয়েই নূর ধড়িয়ে দিয়েছে নিজের ঔচ্ছান্য। মেয়ে হারিয়ে যাওয়ার পর রাজ্য পুলিশের থেকে কোনও সাহায্যই পাননি ওর বাবা। 'প্রমিকের সঙ্গে

পাণিয়েছে' বলে গুরুত্ব দেয়নি খানা। সুপ্রিম কোর্টের 'নির্ধোজ মামলায় বাধ্যতামূলক এফআইআরের নির্দেশকে' বুড়ো অঙ্কুল দেখিয়ে দেয় তারা। কিন্তু হাল ছাড়েননি তার বাবা। প্রতিজ্ঞা করেছিলেন মেথেকে যেখান থেকে যোক ফিরিয়ে আনবেনই। তিনি নিজেই খোঁজখবর নিতে শুরু করেন। এক পরিচিতির সূত্রে শোলেন, তাঁর মেথেকে দেখা পেছে দিল্লির বৌদপরিভে। আর ঘেরি করেননি। ছেলেকে নিয়ে ঘোড়েন সেখানে। কিন্তু দিল্লি পুলিশও তাঁদের কোনও সাহায্য করেনি। কমলা নগর খানার স্মৃতি ছিল, 'যে রাজ্যে হারিয়েছে, সেখানকার এফআইআর ছাড়া হবে না।' যে সামান্য আশা দেখা দিয়েছিল তা আবার দপ করে নিতে গিয়েছিল। সুহানার বাড়ির লোকজনেরও ভরসা ছিল না পুলিশে। দ্বারশ হয় এনজিও-র। দিল্লি যে 'দিলওয়ালো' কা নয়, তত দিনে সুহানা-নূরের বাবারা বেশ বুঝেছেন। ফিরে আসার মুখে হঠাতই শোলেন 'শক্তিবাহিনী' নামে একটি এনজিও-র কথা। এ বার ঘোড়েন সেখানে। তত দিনে অবশ্য দিল্লির ডিসক্রিট কোর্ট স্বতঃপ্ররোচিত হয়ে এই মামলা নেয়। দিল্লি পুলিশকে নির্দেশ দেয় এফআইআর নিতেই হবে। কিন্তু ওই পর্যন্তই। মেয়ে কই? পরে দিল্লি হাইকোর্টেও দুই জায়গার পুলিশকেই কর্তব্যে অবহেলার জন্য তুলোখানা করে। সংস্কার পক্ষে স্ববিকার বললেন, 'আমরা এর আগেও বহু মেয়ে উদ্ধার করেছি ওখান থেকে। তাই বুঝেছিলাম, নূর- সুহানারা ওখানেই আছে।' পুলিশের এই মনোভাবও তাঁদের বহু দিনের চেনা। শুরু হয় 'অপারেশন নূর', ও পরে 'অপারেশন সুহানা'। কিন্তু খিসি ওই জায়গায় খুঁজে পাওয়া ছিল দুঃসহ। আর তার থেকেও বড় কথা খবর পৌঁছে যায় ডেরায়। পুলিশ ও শক্তিবাহিনী যখন ফিরে আসছে, তখন হঠাতই একটা দেওয়াল দেখে সন্দেহ হয় স্বমির। দল-সমেত ফিরে আসেন। তুমুল বাধা দিচ্ছে মাসিরা। ঠিকই বুঝেছেন, দেওয়াল ভাঙ্গা। নাড়া দিতেই খসে পড়ে তা। তার ভিতরে একটা ঘোঁরি ঘর। ঘাড়-মাথা ঠেজে বসে থাকার মতো। অঙ্ককার মুটখুটে। হাত পলাতেই একটা যেন গোঙানির শব্দ। একে একে বের করে আনা হয় আটটি মেথেকে। তাদের মধ্যে নূরও ছিল। ঠিক একই ভাবে একই দ্বক উদ্ধার হয়েছিল সুহানাও। পুলিশ গ্রেতার করে এক চহিকে। তার সূত্রেই নূরের দুই পাচারকারীও ধরা পড়ে। পরে ধরা পড়ে সুহানার পাচারকারীরাও। মেথেকে পেয়ে তখন নূরের বাবা তখন আন্নহারা। দাদারও আনন্দ খরে না। বাড়ি নিয়ে যায় ডাকে। নূরের বাবা বললেন, 'আমার মেয়ে তো কিছুকরেনি। ওকে স্বাভাবিক জীবনে ফিরিয়ে আনাটাই ছিল আমার লক্ষ্য আর ওই লোকগুলোকে শাস্তি দেওয়া'। তিনি সফল দুটোতেই। এই লড়াইয়ে নূর এক বারের জন্যও হাল ছাড়েনি। দিল্লির ডিস হাজারি কোর্টেবারবার ডাক পড়েছে। বাংলার এই প্রত্যন্ত গ্রাম থেকে প্রতি বার গেছে সে। সকলের সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে ভিনিয়ে দিয়েছে মানব তন্ত্রদের। বলছে, যৌনপরিভে কী নির্মম অভ্যচার হত তার উপরে। না, একবারের জন্যও ভয় পায়নি। বলল, 'কীসের ভয়? সবাই তো আমার সঙ্গেই ছিল। বাবা, দাদা, শক্তিবাহিনী, পুলিশ...।' অবশেষে সেই দিন। ডিস হাজারি আদালত নারী পাচারের দায় ওই দু'জনকে সাত বছরের কারাদণ্ড দেয়। হয়তো নূরের জীবনের অন্যতম সেরা মুহূর্ত। আর এখন সেই সময়টার অপেক্ষায় সুহানা। ওর মামলা এখনও চলছে। এ বার শুধুপলা এগিয়ে যাওয়ার। দিল্লির মহিলা কমিশন এ বছরই নূরকে নারী দিবসে তার সাহসিকতার জন্য সম্মানিত করেছে। দিল্লি সিপাল সার্ভিস এইড থেকে সে তিন লক্ষ টাকা ক্ষতিপূরণও পাবে। গর্ভিত বাবা বলছেন, 'আমার মেয়ে পেরেছে। ও আরও এগাবে।' যতসামান্য সরকারি সাহায্যও এখনও তারা পায়নি। যেমন সুহানা মারুখানে স্কুলে যেতে পারেনি বলে ও সাইকেল পায়নি। তা নিয়ে ওর খেদও আছে। স্কুলের প্রধান জানিয়েছেন, তিনি পারবেন না। ডিএম নির্দেশ দিলে তবেই সম্ভব সাইকেল পাওয়া। কিন্তু সাইকেল না পেয়ে পড়ার লড়াই খেসে যাবনি তার। আসলে লড়াই চালাতে পেরেছে বাবা-মাতের উতসাহেই। নূরের বাবা উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক পর্যন্ত পড়েছেন। চাষবাসের সামান্য কাজ করেন। সম্ভলতা নেই। তাও লড়াই ছাড়েননি। নূররা এখন দল বেঁধে স্কুলে যায়। বাড়ি থেকে অনেক দূরে। সে স্কুলে অবশ্য কেউ জানে না নূরের জীবন-কথা। নূরও চায় না তার অতীত খটতে। সে চায় নাসহয়ে মানুষের সেবায় প্রভী হতে। আর যে মেথেরা ওর মতোই হারিয়ে যায়, তাদের জীবনে জাগো দেখাতে। সুহানাও বলাচ্ছে, 'আমি পুলিশ হব। যাতে কেউ আর মেথেরের সঙ্গে এমন করতে না পারে। ধরব পাচারকারীদের। শাস্তি

দেব।' আর বারবারই বলল, 'আমার মতো এমন অভিজ্ঞতা যেন আর কারও না হয়। নিজের এই অভিজ্ঞতা দিয়েই এই সব অঞ্চলে সচেতনতা বাড়ানোর কাজ করব। এত কিছুতে গুলিশ না হলে হবে না।' এর মধ্যেই সাহসিকতা ও আত্মবিশ্বাসের নজির গড়ে সুহানা লখনৌয়ে পাচার-বিরোধী সভায় মক্তব্যও রেখেছে। আলন্দে চকচক করেছে বাবা-মায়ের মুখ। আর অবশ্যে তখন বেজে চলে, 'যে বিজয়ী ধীর, নব জীবনের প্রাতে/ নবীন আশার খল্ল জোমার হাতে।'



#### ANWESHA BANERJEE

Anwesha is currently the chief copy editor at 'El Samay'. Stopping human trafficking has been her mission and towards this she has spent a lot of time on the field exposing the traffickers etc and rescuing children. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best News Report

## A THOUSAND SORDID DECEPTIONS

*The Week, September 28, 2014*

**A** face, crisscrossed with lines, peers from behind of a veil—Jamila's. The “priciest” one in the area, this bride was bartered for a cow. Hailing from Assam, Jamila, 60, is among the oldest of the molki or paro, colloquial terms for women bought from other states, in Haryana's Mewat region. Sold thrice, she was abused not just by the buyers, but the middlemen, too. She was first sold off to a man 37 years ago. Now, she lives with her third husband, who is a cycle rickshaw puller, and seven children.

Mewat is just a few kilometres away from the glitzy Gurgaon's mall mile. With a sex ratio of 907 females for 1,000 males, brides are always in short supply in Mewat. The demand is met by buying them from other states. A majority of them are Muslims from Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha. Most of them are bought when they are 12 to 21 years old, and can be resold till the age of 32. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in its 2013 report on human trafficking mentions that a study that covered 10,000 households revealed that 9,000 women in Haryana had been bought from other states.

Sanjida, 25, was only 11 years old when an “uncle” from her village in Assam trapped her with an offer to take her to Delhi to show her the Red Fort. “I was sold to a 30-year-old man in Nuh,” she says. The man had six children from earlier wives. “I was raped, beaten, abused and made to toil in farms and at home so that he could recover the money he had paid for me,” she says. “I think he made it in a year and sold me to another man in Hatim village.” Five months on, she was resold to a 52-year-old man. “That day, I got to know my price—₹ 30,000,” she says. He kept her for a year and then kicked her out. An old woman gave her food and shelter sold her to a Mubeen. “I can say I was fourth time lucky as I am staying with him for the last 13 years and I have four children,” says Sanjida.

Jamila (sitting on the cot) from Assam was bartered for a cow. Sold thrice, she was abused by both buyers and middlemen.





Sakina, 16, left her village in Assam for Delhi to be a maid. Three months later, she telephoned her brother Shamsul that she had been sold to a family in Pingod village in Haryana. When he reached the village, he found his sister serving as wife to four brothers. He went to the local police, who, after much persuasion from activists and lawyers, rescued Sakina. Now back home, Sakina is trying to start afresh.

But not all rescued women are this fortunate. Hamidan was 12 when she was abducted from Assam in 1995. She was sold ten times, her last buyer being a 68-year-old man with eight children. She had four of her own. When she was rescued by an NGO, she was in no condition to look after herself, let alone her children. She remains confined to her hut in Assam.

"This is the worst kind of trafficking," says Shafiq R. Khan, director, Empower People, an NGO fighting against bride trafficking in Haryana. "Mere teenagers are sold several times to bear children or to work for the family. Yet, they have no status in society. Though 'married' to the buyer, they have no legal right as they are never considered a wife. While this marriage has no legitimacy, it is a great aid for traffickers to avoid being accused of prostitution or trafficking. Mewat has turned into a transit point and the largest market for girls."

Sadly, many older paros are now pushing others into the system. "I was trafficked from Assam for ₹2,000 by my own brother and married off to Khurshid of Besru village in Mewat. After his death, the villagers gave me food, clothes and money to survive. I had seen the demand of girls like me here, so I got seven paros from my village," says Zahira, 40. She points to Asha, sitting next to her, and says, "I got her and her sister Baskar married off here." Asha was trafficked at the age of 12. "My mother Mehram was sold off in Leharwadi village 25 years ago," she says. "My father later sold me and Baskar for ₹4,000. We are not allowed to meet our mother."

The local residents and the panchayats blame the skewed sex ratio and limited land for this practice. "It is a tradition here and we have been buying brides for long," says Nasruddin, who is known for getting the best "deals" in the area. "There are not enough girls in our areas, and if a man is slightly overaged or disabled, he cannot get a bride here. So, what option do we have? We get wives, and these poor girls get food and home, and their families easy money. The system has worked perfectly for decades."

In his late 50s, Nasruddin is from Kama village in Bharatpur district, Rajasthan. He got paros for four of his seven brothers. "Word spread and others requested us to get paros for them, too," he says. "We generally get girls from Bengal, Assam and Bihar. We go, meet girls and select them. A virgin teenager is priced ₹15,000 to ₹50,000, depending on the boy's needs and age. Prices drop with every resale, just like for any other commodity."

Sabir Khan, 28, of Marhi village is the eldest among three brothers. Though his siblings are married, he had trouble finding a bride as he is physically challenged. He recently bought a 16-year-old girl from Patna for ₹40,000. "She helps my mother in household chores and works in my brothers' fields as a help and serves me as wife," he says.

Rehmat, 66, is too old to take care of himself. Two of his earlier paros had left him, and in 2012, a truck driver got him a 14-year-old Bangladeshi for ₹3,000. He is glad she cannot speak the local language. "Where will she go? I bought her to take care of me and bear a child. She should be thankful that I don't thrash her like other paros," he says.

Saleem Khan of Empower People takes me to Rakesh, 28, who works in a brick kiln. After his first wife left him five years ago, Rakesh paid ₹ 30,000 to Zubair, a middleman, to get him his second wife, Sushila Devi, from Godda district in Jharkhand. According to Nasruddin, some want paros as farm or house slaves and not as wives. Badshah Khan (name changed), 35, has a wife and four children, but is heading to Hyderabad to buy a paro to work at home.

Even the political class condones the buying and selling of women. "Paros are a tradition in Mewat; it is not a criminal issue. No complaints have been brought to my notice ever," says Transport Minister Aftab Ahmed, who was elected from Nuh.

Men here say they are doing a favour to these women. "These women don't get food at their homes for days and here they get regular food and clothes. All this comes at a price," says Issar, another local trafficker. At the chaupal (village meeting) in Nimka village, the men say that they have paid for the services of their paros.

But Shaira, 40, from Assam smiles. "Price? My maternal uncle bought me for ₹500 and sold me to a man in Pachanka village," she says. "He raped and beat me for a month." She was resold to another man, who kept her for six months.

Another round of rape, thrashing and abuse followed before she was resold to Jameel. She lived with him for 24 years till he died four years ago. "I am a grandmother today. When I hear my grandchildren spending ₹ 500 on chips and cold drinks, I wonder that that was the price at which my childhood, dreams and life were bought over."

As I get up to leave, she offers me sweets and says, "I spent ₹3 lakh on my daughter's dowry. She will never be a paro. I have paid the price for her life."



#### **AAYUSH GOEL**

A photo journalist with The Week, Aayush has always strived to tell stories revealing the human side of issues. In this quest he has travelled to distant corners of the country and has penned down the tales of his pictures revealing the heart of his subjects and highlighting the pain of the oppressed. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Investigative Story

## SLAVES TO THE GRIND

*Tehelka.com, February 8, 2014*

*Last November, 60 tribal girls from Chhattisgarh were rescued from a factory in Tamil Nadu. The episode put the spotlight on Bastar's ugly secret: 9,000 girls have been trafficked in the past decade*

**R**ajeshwari Salam smiles almost as a reflex action. It does not reach her damp, vacant eyes. Slightly built with common tribal features, the 29-year-old seems more a victim than a liberator who broke the biggest trafficking network of tribals in the country to rescue 60 girls from a slave factory in Namakkal, Tamil Nadu. Sucked into the racket by another tribal, Tijuram Korram, she was sold to a vegetable processing unit where she slaved for 18 hours a day until she developed severe skin disease and acid burns. She escaped from the factory one day but returned determinedly to rescue the other inmates last November.

To meet Rajeshwari, one has to travel to Janakpur on foot for the better part of the day from the headquarters of Kanker district in Bastar region, deep inside Maoist territory. The winter sun is too weak to penetrate through the trees. The slightest rustle of dried leaves can be heard yards away. But human greed knows no bounds as girls are being lured away from this idyllic region to be sold to far-off factories and brothels.

It's almost always someone the girl trusts who gives the final push. The domino effect that follows is also self-willed to the extent that the simpleton might construct it to be an escape from her misery in Bastar, a region synonymous with exploitation, either by the Maoists or by the state administration (or the lack of it).

In the past 10 years, tribal girls have been vanishing from Chhattisgarh at an alarming rate. Official records show that 9,000 girls have gone missing. In reality, the figure could be closer to 90,000, warn local social activists.

Some end up as slaves at factories in Tamil Nadu, working for as little as ₹100 a month, a bar of soap and a bottle of oil. Others end up at houses in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab through a complex network of agents. The green forests, blue skies and warmth of a hearth lost forever in the acid



drums and household chores. The girls are sold for anything from ₹ 5,000 to ₹ 50,000.

As Rajeshwari recounts her tale of horror, the contours of a major crime network built on deceit, allurement and exploitation becomes clear. A man she knew, Korram, offered to take her on a trip to the Balaji temple in Tirupati and even convinced other girls to come with her. For Rajeshwari, who had never travelled beyond Kanker, the idea of going on a train journey seemed exciting.

However, the trip turned into a nightmare when she was taken to Namakkal and sold to a factory. She found other girls in captivity there and heard of several dozen similar stories of Bastar girls held captive in sweatshops all over.

She says there were nearly 100 girls at the factory. They were made to sleep in a single room and share a single toilet. Her chance of escape arrived one day when Korram brought a fresh batch of girls. She told Korram that she had got an allergy from working with chemicals at the vegetable processing factory and demanded that she be sent home. After much coaxing, he agreed to take her back to Bastar, but on the condition that she would arrange for at least 10 other girls. He promised to pay her ₹ 500 for each girl.

When she returned home, Rajeshwari met the Women and Child Development department supervisor, Jagmati Kashyap, and recounted her tale. Before her return, Rajeshwari had chanced upon a factory manager's visiting card while cleaning and kept it. With the help of the visiting card, the police tracked and rescued 60 other tribal girls from the factory.

Last November, 24 girls were rescued from another factory in Erode district.

A human trafficking racket of placement agencies and local agents is operating actively in the region. Initially, it was thought that poverty and a dearth of employment opportunities in the area had resulted in a rising trend of immigration, providing ground for placement agencies. But a probe by



Roll call: Tribal girls from Chhattisgarh who were rescued from a factory in Tamil Nadu

TEHELKA has blown the lid off a trafficking network that subsists on luring girls with promises of pilgrimages and even marriage to local youth, who are hand-in-glove with the traffickers.

### **SIGAY MANDAWI | 21 | BADE JAMHRI, NARAYANPUR DISTRICT**

IN 2007, Sigay Mandawi passed the Class IX exams, becoming the most educated girl in her village. While she was studying at the Government Higher Secondary School in Narayanpur, she met Bijju. One day, Bijju introduced her to his elder brother Tijuram Korram, who said that he could arrange a job for her. Instead, Korram sold her to Gems Agro Exports in Namakkal along with Rajeshwari and others.

Sigay says that the girls had to pick gherkins and then soak them in chemicals to preserve them. The chemicals used in the process caused allergies and their skin began to peel off. They were not allowed medical treatment nor could they rest.

For all the hard work, the girls were paid just ₹100 at the end of the month, which was spent on buying soap and oil. "A few girls were even made to sleep separately and raped almost on a nightly basis," says Sigay. Some were sent back when they became pregnant.

In Rajeshwari's case, she was given an "all-clear" certificate by the Namakkal sub-judicial magistrate, stating that she does not owe any money to the owner of Gems Agro, Junaid Ahmed. The factory was raided after her escape and since then it has been closed down.

The International Labour Organisation estimates that human trafficking in India could be anywhere between 2.5 million to 90 million. Several credible international news reports and NGOs have estimated that almost 20,000 tribals vanish into homes and brothels every year.

The matter had been raised in the Chhattisgarh Assembly several times but the state government has not taken any concrete action except forming an Anti-Human Trafficking Committee. Former home minister Nankiram Kanwar admitted in the Assembly last year that, on an average, five girls go missing from the state every day.

Statistics from the past five years reveal that 9,000 complaints of missing girls have been registered with the police, of which most cases were reported from Raipur. The government claims that the police have traced the whereabouts of 8,000 girls. However, almost 1,000 girls from Bastar and adjoining districts are still missing.

The late Congress leader Nand Kumar Patel had presented in the Assembly a list of 500 girls missing from Raigarh. He had alleged that more than 1 lakh tribal girls have been trafficked from the state.

“We consider human trafficking a serious issue. That’s why right after assuming office, I directed the police to take the strictest action against it immediately,” says new Home Minister Ramsevak Paikra. “It’s a long process but strict action is being taken to bring it under control.”

However, Paikra does not know whether the state has actively followed the cases against factory owners in Tamil Nadu or raised the issue with the Jayalalithaa government. Junaid Ahmed, the owner of Gems Agro, is still at large with no charges against him.

Women and Child Development Minister Ramsheela Sahu assures TEHELKA that her department will try to regulate it at its own level. “Although, the matter falls under the home ministry’s purview, it concerns young girls. So, the department will perform its role,” she says.

The government has accepted that female trafficking is a reality in the state, which is why four districts — Jashpur, Raigarh, Sarguja and Korba — were marked as human trafficking hubs in 2011. Apart from these, Mahasamund, Janjgir, Balauada Bazar and Bilaspur have also been listed as sensitive areas. But some areas of Bastar such as Narayanpur, Kondagaon, Jagdalpur, Sukma, Bijapur and Kanker have been overlooked, providing traffickers and their agents a free run.

The government is taking action against placement agencies. In Jashpur alone, located near the border of Jharkhand with the largest number of placement agencies operating, cases have been booked against seven such agencies. As per the official figures, the number of missing girls appears to be greater in Raipur, but TEHELKA’s investigation reveals that in tribal areas many incidents go unreported because of poverty and illiteracy and, of course, lack of faith in the non-existent system.

For instance, social activist Sidar estimates that more than 10,000 girls have vanished from the two districts of Narayanpur and Kanker in the past four years.

The police claims that it has been doing its bit in tracing, tracking and apprehending traffickers. Last March, two agents, Mani Ram and B Venkat Reddy, were nabbed at the Raipur railway station with 15 girls in the age group of 10-17 years, who were being taken to Nagpur on the pretext of

getting them jobs. Their families had been paid ₹1,000 each in advance. In Nagpur, the agents were to be paid huge sums by the traffickers. Both are now in jail.

Mani Ram is a resident of Bastar and knows Halbi, the language spoken in the areas from where the girls came. In these areas, Hindi or Chhattisgarhi is not spoken. Only two of the victims could understand Hindi. Harma Markami, 10, had never been to school. She believed that girls could not study. She had ventured out in order to find work in Nagpur.

On 23 January, another youth was arrested on charges of human trafficking. He was caught along with 20 locals, mostly minors of whom 14 were tribal girls. According to officials, Mrinal Nayak, 26, was arrested from Kunkuri, a tribal-dominated area located 400 km from Raipur. "We were on his trail for several weeks," says police officer R Kaushik. "He was finally arrested from the Kunkuri bus stand. It was a case of human trafficking. The agent nabbed was from Odisha."

A careful study of the Chhattisgarh map would reveal that while girls from southern parts of the state are trafficked into Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, those from the northern districts such as Raigarh, Sarguja, Jashpur and Bilaspur are taken to Delhi. Similarly, girls from Raipur, Durg and Balod in central Chhattisgarh are sent to Mumbai and other parts of Maharashtra.

The plight of girls such as Rajeshwari, Phutun and Singay, who were rescued from a factory in Tamil Nadu, is no less pitiable as their harrowing tales fail to reach the ears of those who matter in the state capital Raipur.

The state government has announced that each rescued girl will be paid ₹ 1 lakh as part of a rehabilitation scheme, but the district officials in Bastar region claim that they don't have enough funds as it would run into crores for each district. Yet the rescued girls have been made to fill forms and applications and have been assured that they would get ₹50,000 each. Half the promised amount has already been adjusted in their accounts by unscrupulous babus. In a region reeking with exploitation, helpless girls will continue to be traded like animals. Very few are aware and even fewer care.

Thousands of girls from Bastar have been sold off in the past five years, says Sidar. The families are clueless about their whereabouts. The worst part of this agonising tale, says Sidar, is that both the trafficking agents as well as the NGOs that offer to help are profiting from their plight. Some NGO workers who played a part in rescuing the trafficked girls, trick them into believing that the money on offer is ₹ 50,000 and pocket the rest.

There is information that agents have trafficked 250 girls from Darbha near Jagdalpur to a factory in Tamil Nadu, where they are working as bonded labourers. Similar reports are coming from Jashpur, Raigarh, Sarguja and Bilaspur. Girls from these districts have been rescued by the police in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai.

“We have received information that some girls are in Hyderabad. We are going to conduct a survey at the panchayat level with the district collector’s help to find out how many girls are missing from each village,” says Visel Nag, the zila panchayat headman of Narayanpur. “Actually, these are Naxal-affected areas and we are unable to get directly in touch with the people. The agents are exploiting that. Earlier, they lured them by offering jobs. But now with MGNREGA and other such schemes, there is no dearth of employment in our villages. So, the agents have adopted different means.

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **PRIYANKA KAUSHAL**

Priyanka Kaushal has over ten years of experience in both print and electronic media and among her various Awards is the one “Fearless And Best journalist In Chhattisgarh” by Rajya Mahila Aayog, Chhattisgarh Government. She has also coauthored a book. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best Web Feature

# Gender Based Violence

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In the words of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, "Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world. It is a threat to all women, and an obstacle to all our efforts for development, peace, and gender equality in all societies."

The same thought is pursued by Diyes Vyas who argues that while the NCRB data shows that four times more housewives are committing suicides every year than farmers, mostly due to domestic violence and other marital issues, they are not receiving any attention from the government. Violence is normalised in our families and sex in marriage is seen as an entitlement of the man, exposing many women to non-consensual sex in marriage.

Parul Agrawal raises issue of marital rape by sharing with readers the experience of Rashmi who was subjected to violent rape within her marriage. She rebuts the argument of misuse of such a law by women by observing that fear of misuse should not deny anyone their right to justice.

The same gender constructs and social norms that stop a woman from resisting and fighting against domestic violence and marital rape, stop boys and men from seeking help or justice for the sexual violence inflicted on them. Roshini Nair says rape is genderless and quotes data from Ministry of Women and Child Development to drive home the point that boys are as vulnerable to sexual violence as girls are. Yet self-stigma, shame, guilt, self-blame and the social perception that men cannot be raped keeps the issue under wraps.

Similarly, members of the LGBTQ+ community also face extreme forms of sexual violence and exploitation. Annam Suresh documents the lives of the '*Laundas*', the transgender boys who dance at weddings to raunchy numbers in women's clothes and the sexual violence that they are subjected to by men. She also looks at their exploitation by the band masters and the response of the system - be it the family, the medical profession or the police, to their plight.

The insensitivity of the system is a big let down to the victims seeking justice. Dennis Solomon delves on the mediation order passed by a judge in a case of rape and questions the moral as well as the legal validity of the order.

## ઘર બળે છે, જાણી લેવું જોઈએ!

**Divya Bhaskar, December 16, 2015**

દેશમાં આત્મહત્યા કરનારાઓમાં ખેડૂતો કરતાં ગૃહિણીઓનું પ્રમાણ આશરે ચાર ગણું વધારે છે. આ અસહિષ્ણુતાનું શું?

આજે ૧૬મી ડિસેમ્બરનો દિવસ, દિલ્હીમાં નિર્ભયા પર થયેલા પાશવી બળાત્કારની પીડાદાયક સ્મૃતિ તાજી કરાવતો દિવસ છે. મહિલાઓ પર થનારા અત્યાચારોમાંથી સૌથી વધારે ઘાતકી અત્યાચાર હોય તો તે બળજબરીથી થતું શારીરિક શોષણ છે. દેશમાં નિર્ભયાકાંડે એવો માહોલ જરૂર સર્જ્યો કે રેપનો ભોગ બનનારી સ્ત્રી પ્રત્યે સમાજ આજે અગાઉ કરતાં વધુ સંવેદનશીલ બન્યો છે અને તેના દષ્ટિકોણમાં ખાસ્સો બદલાવ આવ્યો છે. કમનસીબે યુવતીઓ-સ્ત્રીઓ ઘરની બહાર જ અસલામત છે, એવું નથી. ઘરની અંદર પણ તેનું શોષણ અને મારણ થતું રહે છે. પરિવારજનોથી કંટાળેલી અને સામાજિક પ્રથાઓ-પરંપરાઓ સામે હારેલી તેમજ આર્થિક રીતે પરાવલંબી એવી સ્વમાની સ્ત્રીઓ માટે ઘણી વખત આત્મહત્યા સિવાય કોઈ માર્ગ બચતો નથી. દેશમાં દર વર્ષે હજારો ગૃહિણીઓ આત્મહત્યા કરે છે. જોકે, આપણે ત્યાં ખેડૂતોની આત્મહત્યાના મુદ્દે બહુ ઊંડાપોહ થતો હોય છે, અનેક રાજ્યોમાં આ મુદ્દે સત્તાઓ બદલાઈ જતી હોય છે, પરંતુ ગૃહિણીઓની આત્મહત્યાના મામલે ભાગ્યે જ ક્યાંય ચર્ચા કે ચિંતા જોવા મળે છે.

દેશમાં ખેડૂતોની આત્મહત્યા જેટલો જ અગત્યનો તેમજ વધારે ગંભીર મુદ્દો ગૃહિણીઓની આત્મહત્યાનો છે. કદાચ આ વાત તમારા માનવામાં નહીં આવે, પણ નેશનલ કાઈમ રેકોર્ડ્સ બ્યુરોના (NCRB) વર્ષ ૨૦૧૪ના આંકડા પુરવાર કરે છે કે દેશમાં થતી કુલ આત્મહત્યાઓમાં ખેડૂતોનું પ્રમાણ ૪.૩ ટકા છે, જ્યારે ગૃહિણીઓની આત્મહત્યાનું પ્રમાણ તેના કરતાં લગભગ ચાર ગણું વધારે એટલે કે અધધ ૧૫.૩ ટકા છે. વર્ષ ૨૦૧૪માં ૫૬૫૦ ખેડૂતોએ આત્મહત્યા કરી હતી, તેની સામે આત્મહત્યા કરનારી ગૃહિણીઓની સંખ્યા ૨૦,૪૧૨ હતી. અલબત્ત, એ વાતનો સંતોષ જરૂર લઈ શકાય કે વર્ષોવર્ષ આ આંકડામાં ઘટાડો થઈ રહ્યો છે, છતાં આંકડા એ વાતની સાબિતી છે કે પરિણીત મહિલાઓની સ્થિતિ આજે પણ એટલી ખરાબ છે કે તેમણે મોતને વહાલું કરવું પડે છે.

ભારતમાં વર્ષ ૨૦૧૪માં કુલ ૧,૩૧,૬૬૬ લોકોએ આત્મહત્યા કરી, જેમાં મહિલાઓની સંખ્યા ૪૨,૫૨૧ છે, તેમાંથી ૨૦,૪૧૨ મહિલા વ્યવસાયે ગૃહિણી હતી. મહિલાઓને આત્મહત્યા કરવા માટે મજબૂર કરનારાં મુખ્ય કારણો જોઈએ : લગ્ન સંબંધિત પ્રશ્નોને કારણે ૪૪૧૧ મહિલાઓએ આત્મહત્યા કરી, દહેજના દોષખને કારણે ૨૨૨૨, લગ્નબાધ સંબંધોને કારણે ૨૪૮, છૂટાછેડાને કારણે ૧૮૩, અન્ય પારિવારિક પ્રશ્નને કારણે ૮૮૭૭ સ્ત્રીઓએ મોતને મીઠું કર્યું હતું. પરિવાર ઘણી વખત આત્મહત્યાને પણ કુદરતી મોત દર્શાવવાની કોશિશ કરતો હોય છે, તો ક્યારેક હત્યાને આત્મહત્યા દર્શાવતા હોય છે. વાસ્તવિકતા જોતાં ઘણી આત્મહત્યાઓ નોંધાતી ન હોય એવું માનવાને ચોક્કસ કારણો છે.

એક તરફ આપણે ગૃહિણીને ગૃહલક્ષ્મી કહીએ છીએ અને છતાં તેની સ્થિતિ એટલી વિકટ હોય છે કે તેને જિંદગી કરતાં મોત વધારે મોહક લાગવા માંડે છે. ઘરની ચાર દીવાલોમાં રહેતી ગૃહિણીએ આત્મહત્યા કરવા મજબૂર થવું પડે, તે હકીકત કોઈ પણ પરિવાર અને સમાજ માટે

લાંછનરૂપ ગણાય.

છેલ્લાં પાંચ વર્ષથી ગૃહિણીની આત્મહત્યાના આંકડા ઘટી રહ્યા છે, પણ તેનો દર અત્યંત ધીમો છે. કમનસીબે આજે પણ મહિલાઓની-ગૃહિણીઓની સમસ્યાઓ અંગે આપણા પરિવારોમાં કે સમાજમાં ગંભીરતા જોવા મળતી નથી. દેશ અને દુનિયા અનેક વિકરાળ સમસ્યાઓ સામે ઝઝૂમી રહ્યાં છે, એ ખરું, પણ આપણું ઘર બળી રહ્યું છે, જરા જાણી લેવું જોઈએ!

(‘દિવ્ય ભાસ્કર’ની ‘કળશ’ પૂર્તિમાં તારીખ ૧૬મી ડિસેમ્બર, ૨૦૧૫ના રોજ પ્રકાશિત ‘સમય સંકેત’ કોલમનો લેખ)



#### **DIVYESH VYAS**

With over 15 years of experience in journalism, Dr. Divyesh Vyas is currently the Deputy News editor in the magazine department of the Gujarati Newspaper Divya Bhaskar and also writes columns for them. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Article



## RAPE IS GENDERLESS

*DNA, November 13, 2014*

*The tendency to center our sexual abuse discourse on the male perpetrator-female survivor prototype is a threat to the well-being of those who don't fall into this category, finds Roshni Nair*

**'B**oy can't be sexually abused: Cops', screamed the headline of a Bangalore tabloid in late October. This was a statement allegedly made by the Mysore police when a distressed father filed a complaint about his four-year-old son being sexually abused. The instance highlighted the addition of yet another spoke in the wheel of archaic thought — a spoke representing the belief that only females can get sexually abused.

A 2007 study of 2,211 children across 13 states by the Ministry of Women and Child Development revealed that 53.22 per cent children reported being sexually abused. Of these, 53 per cent were boys and 47 per cent were girls. An environment propagating the assumption that males can't be abused does further harm to those who've not only been subjected to molestation or sodomy, but also what Radhika Sharma calls 'non-contact abuse'.

Sharma manages the Healing Unit of Arpan, a Mumbai-based NGO dedicated to helping survivors of child sexual abuse. Around 37-38 per cent of their work, she says, has been with male survivors. "Many — mostly second and



third graders — are forced to watch pornographic photos or clips by older boys. They feel confused at first, but are conditioned into thinking it's 'cool' by their seniors," she says. Sexual bullying, she adds, is another cause for concern. "There are boys who either get groped or picked on over their anatomy in a sexual manner."

Ironically, the same patriarchal mindset that places blame on women for 'inviting' rape in some way also denies male survivors the help they need to overcome their trauma. The synonymy of shame and helplessness with sexual abuse and society's pedestal to mardaangi doesn't give males the means to acknowledge that they too can be abused. For this reason, says Sharma, the sense of denial can be more pronounced in male survivors.

Psychiatrist Pavan Sonar agrees. "Many men who've been abused don't seek help for fear of being perceived as 'weak'. The self-blame is amplified because men then hold themselves responsible for not being able to fight back physically," he says. Some even start questioning their sexuality or believing they deserved it if they get an erection during the act. "It takes intensive therapy to convince them that bodily responses are no indicators of consent or complicity," underlines Sonar.

Denial is something Broadway doyen Martin Moran was once familiar with. Through his critically-acclaimed plays, *The Tricky Part* and *All the Rage*, Moran recounts his eventual coming to terms with being a survivor of abuse. He's come a long way from attempting suicide and using sexual compulsivity as a coping mechanism. "Much of my anger was self-directed. It took me years to direct righteous anger towards the man who was idiotic and sick," says the 54-year-old about the abuser he simply calls 'Bob'. Moran, now married to long-time partner Henry Stram, was even asked whether it was the sexual abuse that 'made him gay'. "Being abused has nothing to do with your orientation. I know many heterosexual men who've been abused," he points out. Indeed, self-stigma is common in adult males who've experienced abuse. Institutional rape, such as the kind that reportedly takes place in prisons, is one example. Data on prison rapes is extremely hard to come by, says Vijay Raghavan, Professor of Criminology at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). But that's not to say it doesn't exist. Prisons where undertrials are made to share the same space as hardened convicts can be particularly problematic. Alpha-male dynamics in an environment where inmates jostle for space and power triggers sexual abuse, feels Raghavan.

"Undertrials or short-term prisoners may be targeted by long-term or older prisoners, or those who've been given official duties. The prison being an

institution of scarcity also witnesses sexual trade-offs. Prisoners who need access to basic items or services are sometimes forced to conduct sexual favours," he says. Raghavan believes sexual abuse in prisons is more an expression of power, but psychiatrist Sonar thinks sexual frustration can be a trigger too. "Unfulfilled sexual desires and instincts could play a role. In such an environment, the victim may also become submissive since there's no way out," he says.

But what about those who don't fall in the male-female binary?

Urmi Jadhav, a transgender representative at Humsafar Trust, has plenty to say about this. In a doctor's cabin off a narrow corridor in the NGO's Vakola office, she tells this reporter about the heinous degrees of sexual abuse transgenders are subjected to. These include cases of gangrape, sex at knifepoint, and coercive unprotected sex. "One of my friends had her earlobe completely bitten off because she refused to be with someone who didn't want to wear a condom," she says haltingly, before adding. "Another had her nipple ripped off by a perpetrator so barbaric that he lost a tooth during the act."

Urmi says that up to 90 per cent of transgenders are engaged in sex work since it pays better than begging and dancing at weddings, et al. But as in the case of female sex workers, they're constantly told they invite abuse just for being in the profession they are in. "There's a mentality that transgenders are 'easy', that we are made for sex. A transgender who has been abused has no recourse because even cops think we ask for it," stresses Urmi. Complicating the situation further is the notion of 'unnatural sex' or an act that doesn't involve peno-vaginal penetration. "There's anal rape, oral rape, digital rape (the use of fingers and/or other external objects). People don't realise that," she shares. The limited understanding law enforcement officials have of the various forms of abuse — including verbal sexual abuse such as eve teasing — is a major reason why transgenders have little to no grievance redressal mechanisms.

Almost all transgenders in India have been abused in some way or the other, reckons Urmi. One wonders whether the transition from male to female has anything to do with this. Does the sexist view that women are 'easier' and weaker, or the ambiguity (and the 'taboo') associated with a body that's home to both masculinity and femininity — despite 'hijras' identifying as females — have anything to do with it? Urmi smiles when asked about this. "It happens a lot. Transgenders who're already transitioning mentally as children are most vulnerable," she says, chronicling her own struggle against sexual bullying in school. "I was sometimes forcefully kissed. Some boys would put their hands

up or down my pants or corner me in the toilets. Anybody with the slightest 'hint' of femininity is singled out," she informs.

There's no doubt that the majority of sexual abuse survivors — and victims — are women. But centering the sexual abuse discourse on a heteronormative fulcrum and excluding the possibility that boys can also be vulnerable to abuse is a disservice to those who've survived, but remain silent. This includes cases of women-on-women and women-on-men abuse.

The message is perhaps best summed by Arpan's Radhika Sharma. "Many parents, through their subconscious gendered lens, tell daughters to remain safe and vigilant," she says. "It's time they tell their sons the same."

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



**ROSHNI NAIR**

Roshni Nair is a features writer with Hindustan Times. She likes writing, loves animals, and hates talking about herself in third person. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Feature

## JUDGE'S ORDER RETROGRADE: ACTIVISTS

*The Hindu, June 25, 2016*

*Where is the question of mediation in a rape case when convict's prayer itself is for bail, ask experts.*

**T**he single judge's order directing a case of rape to be referred for mediation has come in for sharp criticism in legal circles. Experts question the need for suggesting mediation when that was not even the prayer by the convict himself.

"One cannot pass any judgment on a bail application. When the prayer is for bail, where is the question of mediation? Secondly, one cannot pass an order directing mediation without asking the victim whether she wants that. When the applicant himself has not asked for it, how can mediation be suggested," asked retired judge of the Madras High Court, K. Chandru.

V. Suresh, National General Secretary, Peoples' Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), said, "It is a retrograde order. It is against the very fundamentals of rape jurisprudence. Rape cases cannot be settled outside the frame of law. Directing mediation to a rape victim only unleashes violence once again on the victim."

Referring to a Supreme Court judgment on no compromise being permissible in a rape case, he asked, "When the prayer itself is for bail, where is the question of mediation?"

Noted advocate and a member of the PUCL, Nagasaila, found the order "untenable and illegal," and wondered how such an order could be passed.

"Whenever a crime is committed, it is perceived no longer as a crime against the individual but against the society. That's why the State is the respondent in these cases. Punishments are a deterrent against crimes. This order hits at the very base of jurisprudence," she said.

Only smaller cases like cheating and causing nuisance could be referred for mediation with the permission of the court, but not grave offences like rapes, which have to be dealt with strongly. "Rape cases cannot be settled outside the legal framework." Terming the order "distasteful," she said that such an order could not be passed without knowing the mindset of the victim. "The

order says it was considering the fatherless child but what about the woman's rights on her own body and her life? How can you bring in sentiments of a child and hand over the lives of a woman and a child to a rapist? It is horrifying to note that such an order has come from Constitutional authority," she said.

Referring to an amendment made in the Criminal Procedure Code in 2006 over plea bargaining which was prevalent in the Western countries, she said, "Even plea bargaining cannot be allowed in cases of rape."

### **'How can I live with him?'**

It has been seven long years, but uncertainty and anxiety still loom large over 22-year old Lakshmi (name changed) of a remote village in Cuddalore district, as the unwed mother spends every other day unsure and confused over what the future holds for her and her six-year-old daughter.

Speaking to The Hindu over phone, the rape survivor, whose case has been referred for mediation by a single judge of the Madras High Court, says she was not aware of the order but mediation was initiated even earlier by the family of the convict, who, incidentally, lives just next door in her village.

"But how can I live with him? Would he accept the solution if it had happened to one of his sisters? Not even once has he visited us. He has not even touched this girl even once. He has been maintaining that she was not his child until the DNA test. Why has he not come for a compromise before he was jailed," she asks, pertinently. The incident happened when she was in Class 10 and the convict was a college-goer in Chennai and visited his native place on weekends.

"He is coming for a compromise so that he can be out of prison. I hate the very sight of him and how can I live with him as man and wife? I don't have any sense of belonging to him," she says. Over seven years since, the survivor, presently being supported by her relatives is still confused over how to settle this overwhelming issue in her life.

"How can I live in this world with this girl? If not for my daughter, I would have remained this way. But what will happen to me and my daughter now? After my mother, who will take care of us?"



### **DENNIS SOLOMON JESUDASAN**

Working with The Hindu, Dennis focusses on issues concerning the marginalized, oppressed and invisible sections of the society to help get them visibility and amplify their voices for eg. Victims of bonded labor, controversial orders against victims of gender violence. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best News Report

## मेरे पति ने मेरे साथ बलात्कार किया

www.bbchindi.com, May 16, 2015

**ल** गातार दुप्पटे से अपना मुंह ढंकने की कोशिश करते हुए वो बारबार पूछती है कि 'मेरा चेहरा छिप गया है? और मैं लगातार उसे यह विश्वास दिलाने की कोशिश करती हूँ कि इंटरव्यू के दौरान उसकी पहचान किसी कीमत पर जाहिर नहीं होगी।

लगभग अंधेरे से एक कमरे में, छिपे मुंह के साथ जब वह कैमरे के सामने बैठी तो बोली, 'दरअसल मेरे मकान मालिक को नहीं पता है कि मैं यह केस लड़ रही हूँ, उन्हें पता लग गया तो वह मुझे घर से निकाल देंगे।

पच्चीस साल की रश्मि (यह नाम उन्होंने बीबीसी के इंटरव्यू के लिए अपनाया) का कहना है कि शादी के बाद उनके पति ने कई बार उनके साथ बलात्कार किया और अब वह इंसाफ पाने की अदालती लड़ाई लड़ रही हैं।

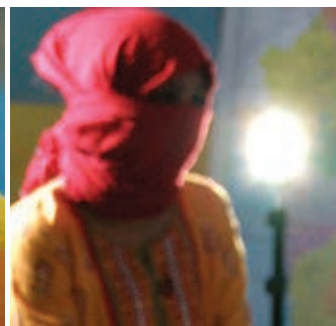
'मैं हर रात उनके लिए सिर्फ एक खिलौने की तरह थी, जिसे वो अलग-अलग तरह से इस्तेमाल करना चाहते थे. जब भी हमारी लड़ाई होती थी तो वह सेक्स के दौरान मुझे टॉर्चर करते थे. तबियत खराब होने पर अगर कभी मैंने न कहा तो उन्हें वह बर्दाश्त नहीं होता था'।

### पवित्र बंधन !!!

भारत में 'वैवाहिक बलात्कार' यानी 'मैरिटल रेप' कानून की नजर में अपराध नहीं है. यानि अगर पति अपनी पत्नी की मर्जी के बगैर उससे जबरन शारीरिक संबंध बनाता है तो उसे अपराध नहीं माना जाता।

पिछले दिनों केंद्रीय गृह राज्यमंत्री हरिभाई पारथीभाई से राज्यसभा में सवाल किया गया कि भारत में 'वैवाहिक बलात्कार' को कानून बनाने के लिए क्या सरकार की ओर से पहल की जाएगी?

इसके जवाब में पारथीभाई ने कहा कि, 'वैवाहिक बलात्कार को जिस तरह विदेशों में समझा जाता है उस तरह भारत में लागू करना संभव नहीं क्योंकि हमारी सामाजिक, धार्मिक सोच, आर्थिक स्थितियां, रीति-रिवाज अलग हैं और हमारे यहां विवाह को एक पवित्र-बंधन माना जाता है'।



इससे पहले फरवरी 2015 में सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने रश्मि की याचिका को यह कहकर खारिज कर दिया कि किसी एक महिला के लिए कानून में बदलाव करना मुमकिन नहीं।

हालांकि पारथीभाई के बयान से वैवाहिक बलात्कार पर एक बार फिर बहस छिड़ गई है। नामी वकीलों, महिला अधिकारों के लिए काम करने वालों और अंतरराष्ट्रीय मीडिया के बीच सरकार की इस सोच को लेकर काफी आलोचना हुई।

रश्मि अपने केस के जरिए आईपीसी की धारा 375 में संशोधन कर 'वैवाहिक बलात्कार' को दंडनीय अपराध बनाए जाने की लड़ाई लड़ रही हैं।

### पूजा का बदला

लेकिन रश्मि अकेली ऐसी औरत नहीं जिन्हें लगता है कि शादीशुदा जिंदगी में उनके साथ बलात्कार हुआ।

42 साल की पूजा तीन बेटियों की मां हैं और शादी के 14 साल बाद उन्होंने अपने पति के खिलाफ घरेलू हिंसा का मामला दायर किया।

वह कहती हैं कि पति से अलग होने की बुनियादी वजह 'जबरन सेक्स' और 'यौन हिंसा' है।

पूजा कहती हैं, 'मैं पत्नी थी इसलिए मुझे न कहने का अधिकार नहीं था। पूरे घर का काम और बच्चों को संभालने की जिम्मेदारी मेरी थी। मेरे पति ने मेरे लिए एक नियम बना रखा था। घर में कितना भी काम हो और मैं कुछ भी कर रही हूँ, हर रात दस मिनट मुझे उनके लिए तैयार रहना पड़ता था'।

'इसके बाद मैं बचा हुआ काम निपटाती थी और फिर सोती थी। थकान भरा शरीर और बेमन से किए जाने वाले सेक्स से मैं धीरे-धीरे ऊबने लगी। एक समय ऐसा आया जब मैं जिंदा लाश की तरह बस लेटी रहती थी, लेकिन तब मेरे पति सेक्स के दौरान और हिंसक हो गए'।

पूजा अब अपने पति से अलग रहती हैं। अपनी बेटियों की परवरिश के लिए कोर्ट के जरिए पति से उन्हें कुछ पैसे मिलते हैं लेकिन वह उन्हें तलाक नहीं देना चाहती।

वह कहती हैं, 'मैंने पति को तलाक दे दिया तो वह दूसरी शादी कर लेंगे। मैं नहीं चाहती कि जिस तरह उन्होंने मेरे शरीर को इस्तेमाल किया उस तरह वह किसी और की जिंदगी बर्बाद करें। मैं चाहती हूँ उन्हें सजा मिले'।

### 'बलात्कारी में फर्क क्यों'

सुप्रीम कोर्ट की वकील और महिला अधिकारों के लिए काम करने वाली करुणा नंदी सजा के इसी प्रावधान के लिए कानून में बदलाव की बात करती हैं।

वह कहती हैं, 'भारत में घरेलू हिंसा के मामले सिविल कोर्ट में निपटाए जाते हैं। घरेलू हिंसा कानून क्रूरता के आधार पर औरत को पति से तलाक लेने की छूट तो देता है, लेकिन पत्नी को नुकसान पहुंचाने और जबरन यौन संबंध बनाने का जो अपराध पति ने किया है उसकी सजा उसे कैसे मिलेगी?'

'बलात्कार एक अपराध है और बिना रजामंदी के किया गया सेक्स बलात्कार के दायरे में आता है। करने वाला पति है या कोई और इससे कानून पर असर नहीं पड़ना चाहिए'।



कई सर्वे और अध्ययन यह साबित करते हैं कि पत्नी के साथ जबरन सेक्स और यौन हिंसा के मामले भारत में हर जगह हैं।

साल 2005-2006 में हुए 'नेशनल फैमली हेल्थ सर्वे-3' के मुताबिक, भारत के 29 राज्यों में 10 फीसदी महिलाओं ने माना कि उनके पति जबरन उनके साथ शारीरिक संबंध बनाते हैं।

'इंटरनेशनल सेंटर फॉर वुमेन और यूनाइटेड नेशन्स पॉपुलेशन फंड' की ओर से साल 2014 में सात राज्यों में कराए गए एक सर्वे के मुताबिक एक-तिहाई पुरुषों ने यह माना कि वह अपनी पत्नियों के साथ जबरन सेक्स करते हैं।

### **बदतर हालत**

लेकिन सवाल यह है घर की चारदीवारी में पति-पत्नी के अंतरंग क्षणों में क्या हुआ इसकी गवाही कौन दे सकता है? पति यह कैसे साबित कर सकता है कि सेक्स के दौरान पत्नी की रजामंदी शामिल थी या नहीं।

वैवाहिक बलात्कार को अपराध का दर्जा दिए जाने का विरोध कर रहे लोगों को कानून के दुरुपयोग का खतरा बढ़ा लगता है।

पुरुषों के अधिकारों के लिए काम करने वाली संस्था सेव द फैमिली फाउंडेशन की प्रवक्ता ज्योति तिवारी कहती हैं, 'हमने देखा है कि घरेलू हिंसा कानून यानी 498ए का औरतों ने दुरुपयोग किया है'।

'महिला आयोग ने भी कहा कि रेप के कई झूठे मामले अदालतों तक पहुंचे हैं और इससे कई जिंदगियां बर्बाद हुई हैं. बेडरूम को अदालतों तक ले जाने की यह कोशिश बहुत खतरनाक साबित होगी'।

हालांकि वैवाहिक बलात्कार को कानून के दायरे में लाने की कोशिश कर रहे एडवोकेट अरविंद जैन के मुताबिक किसी कानून के दुरुपयोग का डर अन्याय या इंसाफ न दिए जाने की वजह नहीं हो सकता।

वह कहते हैं, 'अगर आप पति को कानूनन अपनी पत्नी के बलात्कार की इजाजत देते हैं तो घर में पत्नी का दर्जा सेक्स वर्कर से भी बदतर हुआ. कम से कम सेक्स वर्कर न तो कह सकती है. पत्नी को तो आपने न कहने का अधिकार भी नहीं दिया. उसकी सुनवाई कहां होगी, क्योंकि कानून आपने बनाया नहीं और इसलिए अदालतें बात सुनेंगी नहीं'।



### **PARUL AGARWAL**

Starting her career producing Citizen Journalist Show for IBN7, Parul moved on to BBC to report on national and global stories reporting on mercury pollution and making a multi media project of 100 years in Delhi. Her interest lies in public activism and role of citizen journalism. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Feature

## WOMEN AND THE TROUBLE WITHIN/ WITHOUT HOMES

*www.theladiesfinger.com, December 9, 2015*

**"B**etween midnight and 4am is the most frightening time for a girl sleeping in the open," says 22-year-old Farida Sheikh, who was born and raised on the street. "Any passing drunk can grope her breast, thigh, yoni..." Farida touches herself matter-of-factly as she explains. "But the question I ask is how safe are women even within their homes?"

She has reason to ask this, sitting as we are at Urja Trust, close to Dadar station, at the arterial centre of Mumbai. It is a green-walled, two-storey cottage which serves as a shelter home for girls and women in distress, who have no other place to live.

A friend, who is a mental health counsellor at Urja, has sent me to meet the girls. "Just speak with them," she urged, when I said that I felt awkward about the difference in our situations. I have a home to go back to.

"Tell them what it is like to be a writer. I want them to meet as many people as possible from various walks of life," she explains, "so they know it is possible..."

"What is possible?" I interrupt.

"To find a path... To gain," she says, "an independent identity, despite all they've been through."

I've read the literature before coming here. It says, "almost 70 percent of girls who leave home are forced out by their families and 30 percent opt to leave home themselves, but it is important to understand that both situations arise from dysfunctional families, difficult circumstances, and abuse."

Still unsure, I ask if I can speak with a couple of them, to understand their circumstances a little better. I am allowed an interview with 32-year-old Lakshmi, who has lived at the Urja shelter for a year and half.

"Before marriage," she says, "I schooled at our local Gujarati-medium school, which has only up to the seventh standard. After this my father and brothers said they didn't have the time to drop and pick me up from the senior school that is further away. I could not be sent alone, since I was fair and pretty. I might get into trouble. So they kept me at home."

Lakshmi is homeless and without a livelihood. Others decided her destiny then, but now she alone must decide her path from among the choices that Urja Trust can offer her.

Lakshmi's story raises, for me, essential questions of how she is to rebuild a broken faith in society, and a new, never-before faith in herself.

I came to Urja Trust expecting to meet women like Lakshmi, victims of an unkind patriarchy, but am wholly unprepared for Farida. I first spot her walking shoulder-to-shoulder with Leela Patade, a senior social worker here. Farida does the lion's share of the talking, while Leela mostly nods. Farida seems a ward, of sorts, to her.

The young woman has light brown hair and eyes, and a snub-nose. In a pair of fitting jeans and an oversized checked shirt over a singlet, she seems no different from a middle-class college student. Except for a certain freedom in the way she moves and an unconservative idea she airs within ten minutes of meeting me.

"The girls who come here," Farida says, indicating with a tilt of her head, the women sitting in the porch, "have quite some options. Urja helps you choose who you want to be. But many cling to the memory of that one love or marital relationship that went wrong, and refuse to move on. A man-woman relationship is just one aspect of a person's life. More important is personal growth and developing an independent identity. Not as a woman in traditional roles, but as a human being."

Farida lived on a stretch of pavement in south Mumbai till she was 14 years old. Since then, she's lived in shelter homes (including Urja's), as well as private and government hostels that they arranged for her to stay at, so she could pass her tenth and twelfth standard exams without distraction. She now shares an apartment with two other girls in Virar, a suburb in northwest Mumbai, is doing her Bachelor's degree in Psychology and working part-time.

During subsequent interviews, I take Lakshmi and Farida's permission to write about them. I promise them anonymity. Each pauses to think, and then states clearly, jaw-squared, that she wishes to be named; that she has nothing to hide.

So, Lakshmi is her real name.

"My name is Lakshmi Chauhan," she says. "Before marriage I was Lakshmi Vaghela. I am an orphan. I belong to the Gujarati Hindu community. I have three daughters."

"My mother died when I was a year and half old. In 2003, when I was 21, I lost my father, too. A woman who attended my father's funeral, asked for my hand in marriage for her nephew. She was insistent. She said he had studied away from Mumbai and would get a good job with the Municipality, just like his father had. In 2007, I was married to him. At first, my husband and in-laws were kind to me. Then they began to set rules: stay veiled, don't speak to anybody, don't go out of the house, stay in and do all the housework. I said to myself, it's okay. Such is a woman's life. But when I was pregnant with my first daughter I found out [my husband] was having an affair with his own cousin sister. When I protested, he started beating me up. My own brothers did not believe this was true and looked on me with suspicion.

I left my husband's home once when the abuse got intolerable. My brothers discouraged legal action. So we complained to the Gujarati Samaj, even went to the police, but eventually, when everyone assured me that my husband would reform, I returned to him. I thought: our little girl is so lovable, he will reform and be a good father to her. But the beatings continued. He did not go to work. He would demand sex at any time and beat me up if I refused. My in-laws said I had to obey my husband. Because he was my husband, I had to do whatever he said. They began to torture me for the 5 lakh rupees that my father had left me in bank deposits, and all the more because I had produced a daughter.

"I had a second child, because my husband hoped for a son. Then during an unwanted third pregnancy, the family would not give me more than two meals a day. They restricted my access to my other children and I had to do all the housework even though I was very weak from the beatings."

Finally, a five-month pregnant Lakshmi was thrown out of home with her two little children. She went to live with her brother who admitted her in hospital for treatment. She was severely anaemic. When she had a third daughter, Bhavya, her husband stated that the child was not his, and refused to take them back home.

"I filed an FIR against my husband. The police would call me to the station every two weeks, but he would not turn up. 'What can we do!' they'd say. 'We can hardly force him to come here!' I appealed to the Gujarati Samaj – the elders and women's groups – but he would not take me back."

"You wanted to return to the home where they were ill-treating you?" I can't hide my surprise.

"My husband has taken away my two older girls, who are just seven and four years old! When they were born he would not even look at them. He would not take them to a doctor if they fell ill nor even buy clothes for them to wear. He would beat them if they came to me at night... They're made to do housework, spoken to harshly, and never taken even to the park to play. The younger child has been withdrawn from school.

I wanted to go back for their sake, but the people at Urja Trust convinced me to stay here and fight for them. If I go back to my husband, I might contract an STD or HIV, since he is promiscuous... or he could even kill me. Out here, I have a hope of rebuilding my life. My third child is in school already. I don't need anything for myself, but my two girls... My husband might sexually abuse them. I fear greatly for their safety." Her voice peters off.

And what about you? I ask. How will you heal from your personal trauma, of abuse, beatings and... I don't say the word "rape". But her slight body stiffens with what I've unintentionally evoked, and I'm immediately uneasy.

"When I think of what I've been through," she says, slowly, "my eyes fill up... my heart is heavy." Abruptly, she gets up and goes to her child who has toddled away.

Should a woman continue in an unequal power equation at the cost of her health and happiness? What can she do to change the balance of power? I decided to put this question to someone who comes from a different socio-cultural set-up from Lakshmi.

Sitting astride a bench that serves for dining chairs in her tastefully sparse, sunlit apartment in Andheri West, Mumbai, an area that houses many of her peers and colleagues, actress Arpita (not her real name), known for her sensitive and diverse portrayal of women in Hindi and English cinema, says that although she was financially independent of her Producer-Director partner, she hesitated for years to leave their failing marriage.

Arpita tells me she's had a lot of trouble getting this apartment to rent, although it belongs to a friend. In Mumbai, your religion and marital status are scrutinised by the pillars of authority in housing society committees, and it's a test that takes sweet talk, begging and sometimes a white lie or two, to pass. Arpita's mother had to present herself at the housing society meetings and assure them that her now-single daughter does not live alone. She too lives here with her!

“When we were first married, I wanted to nurture him and our relationship. But as time passed and things were not harmonious, I began to try to please him. I would not go out with my friends unless he came along. I would wait for him all night if he didn’t return from work or a party. I steadily lost confidence in my ability to be my own person. When he said derogatory things about my talent, I began to believe him. Then when the relationship got worse despite all my efforts to save it, I was worried about our public image. Privately too, I wondered, if I move out, will I be welcome anywhere else? Will I be safe out there? I guess I stopped seeing myself as an individual.”

A year after she left the home they shared, she says finds joy in the smallest of things she does independently. She is thinking for herself again. She even opted out of a new relationship, when she found herself falling into the old patterns of behaviour.

It might come down to the question of how a woman sees herself. The mirror is not without skewed perspectives, however: What we are taught about our bodies, and our right over it, is one of these facets.

Lakshmi and Urja Trust switched to a more proactive tack. In consultation with lawyers from the Human Rights Law Network, they filed a custody claim, for her older girls, at the Family Court in Bandra.

Among the options that Urja Trust offered her, Lakshmi chose to study further. They registered her for coaching classes a year and half ago. She is taking her Class 10 Board exams, even as I tell her story.

Farida was born beyond walls, on the street, to parents who were born and raised on the street. A “scholarship” of ₹150 per month from the Indian Association for Promotion of Adoption & Child Welfare put her through her initial years of study. She began to visit the day care centre of an NGO called Saathi when she was ten years old, and at 14, packed two sets of clothes in a plastic bag and shifted into their shelter.

“I hated living on the street. My father would drink and abuse my mother and me. He would beat me up, sometimes even feed me chillies. My grandmother lived in a slum and I used to go stay with her as much as I could. My family still lives on the street. There you don’t have obligations of tradition, religion and caste, and no overheads of rent or electricity bills. You live a day at a time and have no further ambition. A young girl pairs up with a man early. I worry about my 16 and 18-year-old sisters. I tried, recently, to move them into my flat but they returned to the street in four days.”

Farida seems candid about her background, the first time I meet her, so I ask if I may see her home and meet her mother. "Sure," she says. "But will you be comfortable coming there with me?" The lines between 'housed' and 'homeless' are invisible, but almost inviolate in this city.

Three weeks later, we board a local train to Mumbai Central. Her mother calls several times along the way, to check on our progress. I hear Farida asking her if she has arranged everything properly, at their home.

"What is she arranging?" I ask, curiously.

"She's shifting her customers away from our space," Farida grins. "She runs a gambling business. Customers pay her about ₹20 for each game. With the money she earns, she even helps me out with the rent on my flat."

We emerge from Mumbai Central station and cross a main street of fast-moving traffic. On the wide, neat pavement flanking the bus depot, not pausing in her step, Farida nods curtly to a man resting tiredly against some boxes. "My father," she informs me stiffly over her shoulder. "He has tuberculosis, so he's pretty quiet these days." I attempt an awkward smile at him. He looks back at me, confused.

We are, I realise suddenly, in Farida's home. Over her father's head are colourful clothes drying on a clothesline tied between a pole and a bus stop. A few feet away, pots and pans and provisions are neatly piled. The gamblers are not to be seen. Farida indicates with a look that they have been shifted to the other side of the parked taxis.

Farida's mother, Kammo, bustles over. She has a big smile and kohl-lined eyes. She's wearing a well-stitched salwar kameez, has large rings in her ears and thick hair drawn into a bun. The only sign that belies her middle-class appearance is the turning aside and spitting of betel nut juice. Her eyes dart often towards the taxis behind which her customers play and she disappears a couple of times to check on the progress of the game.

Kammo and Farida tell me about their home as we share a bottle of Mirinda that Kammo has fetched from a store across the busy street. They've seated me at the bus stop, which, I can't help observing, doubles as a kind of living room. Kammo hardly speaks, only smiles widely when I ask her if she's proud of Farida who is about to write her first year Bachelor of Arts (in Psychology) exams.

She only speaks to tell me that she was born on the street and is so habituated to the constant sound of traffic that she would not be able to live within walls.

"Do you feel safe in the open?" I ask.

"It's safe," she shrugs. "We know everything about this place," she waves a hand in the direction of the pavement.

I'm in the inner rooms of the poor. As a writer, this is not the first time I've accessed the personal spaces of their lives. But standing here I am piercingly aware that when I cover stories about middle-class or upper crust people, I set up euphemisms and aliases to mask identities. The mirror is turned my way on this wide-open street with its generous homeless.

She points at the two furry black stray dogs. "These are ours. They protect us and our belongings." Nair Hospital, a government facility is close by. She took Farida's father there when he got sick. They use the public toilet nearby for their ablutions. Kammo bids us goodbye at the gigantic gates of Mumbai Central station, a stone's throw away from her 'home'.

"My mother is just 38 years old," Farida tells me on the train back to Virar where she now lives. "She was 15 when I was born. We are more like friends. I used to tell my mother to leave my father, but she opted to stay. My father would abuse her earlier, but over the years, his drinking (alcohol) made him weak. She's stronger than him now. She takes care of him and he doesn't abuse her anymore." Not walled-in as deeply by traditional gender roles, Kammo has shifted the balance of power, to give herself the space to breathe.

"I got my parents married three years ago," Farida recounts, "because I needed some legal identity papers. I had none. But the Maulvi who married them, asked me for Rs 8,000 to produce a marriage license. So I let it go. Documentation of identity is a big problem when you try to become independent..."

Many of the women at Urja Trust, including Lakshmi are troubled by this. In several cases, Leela says, not just personal valuables like gold jewellery, but crucial documents like a Voter ID, PAN Card, passport, bank documents, and academic reports are still in the homes they've abruptly left. "There is a great need for a centralized system of record-keeping of the citizenry," she shakes her head. "We managed to procure a copy of Lakshmi's school-leaving certificate from her old school, which worked as proof-of-age. Some years ago she had secretly photocopied her bank passbook, which has her home address. With these, she's been registered to take the tenth standard State Board exams."

In more ways than one, it is not easy to pick up the pieces. Still they work at it, a day at the time. I'm moved by the courage with which women like Lakshmi



and Farida fight the odds stacked against them. Traditionally, the home is their domain. Walled-out, what is home to them now?

A half smile on her lips, Lakshmi replies, "A home is a place of your own. It's where your parents are. If, like me, you don't have parents, then it could be where your husband and his parents are... I left one home and was torn away from the other." Rallying around, almost as if to console herself, she says, "But I have this shelter. The people here are both mother and father to me. This place is my home."

What is home, I ask Farida then. "I don't have a very good answer for you," she replies in her clear voice, after some thought. "But here it is. A home is where your blood relatives live. Even if it has no roof and walls, it is still home."

"But when I need comfort and strength, I come here." She looks in the direction of the peeling green house with its lines of clothes drying and empty buckets; the leaf-littered yard, with its motley women. "Here I feel that I too own something. A bit of peace."

In April this year, Farida was suspended from college for poor attendance. The Principal said they supported 'underprivileged students' but refused to take into consideration that the girl is a first generation learner. She has joined college again and is regular. After a serious bout of depression, she moved back into the Urja shelter, where they make sure she stays emotionally stable.

Lakshmi failed the tenth standard exams. She has not seen her daughters in two years and this distresses her. She interned at the Taj Mahal Hotel for three months and has been offered a job as a trainee. But because she has no identity documents in her own possession, she must wait until the Aadhar Card she's applied for, comes through.

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **CHATURA RAO**

Chatura Rao is a Mumbai-based journalist and an author. She writes for the Hindu, scroll.in, Open magazine, Yahoo Originals and The Ladies Finger. Her books are published by leading publishing houses. Her most recent books are *A Blueprint for Love*, for adults, and *Gone Grandmother*, a picture book for children. Chatura teaches creative writing to children. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Feature

# Women and Work

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Gender plays a major role in determining not just the value of women's labor but also what professions and jobs they opt for and their career graphs. The gendered roles and norms as well as the non-supportive and at times hostile work environment are responsible for creating the glass ceilings in organizations and professions which limit the career progression and aspirations of many women.

The selected writings in this section deal with the under representation of women in some crucial fields, the challenges faced by women in their work places and the need for focusing more on the occupational hazards faced by women, particularly in the farming sector where they are more visible, and finding solutions to mitigate the same.

While Purnima Sharma draws our attention to the mere 3% representation of women as Vice Chancellor's in the country, Manisha Pande highlights the under representation of women in media in terms of their presence in articles with bylines, in op-ed pages, in the top management positions as well as in the so called male beats of National Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, sports, business etc.

Babulaal Naga on the otherhand makes a scathing remark on the lack of redressal and retribution mechanisms to victims of workplace harassment.

Similarly, while Sachin Kumar Jain deals with the discriminatory impact of so called 'development' on women farmers, Kasturi Ray speaks about the need to acknowledge the role of women in farming and address their technological needs as well as the occupational hazards that they face. She profiles the work of Directorate of Resarch for Women in Agriculture and the technological solutions that it is providing to women farmers.

The exploitation of Anganwadi workers, the discrimination faced by female cops, and the fight of a woman journalist against a media house's discriminatory policies towards pregnant women are also discussed in this section highlighting the difficult circumstances in which women work.

The well researched and insightful articles in this section leave you wondering about the extent to which women's work participation is influenced by their gender roles.

## वाइस चांसलर की कुर्सी तक क्यों नहीं पहुंच पाती महिलाएं?

**Navbharat Times, March 28, 2016**



श का एजुकेशन सेक्टर इन दिनों निर्णायक किस्म के बदलाव से गुजर रहा है। कॉलेजों और यूनिवर्सिटीज की संख्या बढ़ी है। 1950 में 20 यूनिवर्सिटीज के मुकाबले आज देश में करीब 700 यूनिवर्सिटीज हैं। कॉलेजों की संख्या 37 हजार को पार कर चुकी है। देश के कई महत्वपूर्ण विश्वविद्यालयों और शिक्षा संस्थानों में छात्राओं की संख्या छात्रों से ज्यादा हो गई है। जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय (जेएनयू) में छात्राओं का हिस्सा 62 फीसदी से ज्यादा है। आईआईएमसी जैसी मास कम्युनिकेशन संस्थाओं के कई कोर्सेज में छात्राओं की भागीदारी 75 परसेंट से भी ज्यादा है। उच्च शिक्षा में ऐसा राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर है।

भारत सरकार के सर्वेक्षण से पता चलता है कि छात्राओं की उपस्थिति दक्षिण भारतीय राज्यों में ज्यादा बढ़ी है, जबकि बिहार और झारखंड जैसे राज्यों को अभी लंबा सफर तय करना है। भारत जैसे विकासशील देश के लिए निस्संदेह यह बेहद महत्वपूर्ण बदलाव है। देश में लड़कियों के लिए पहला स्कूल 1848 में पुणे के भिडेवाड़ा में फुले दंपती ने खोला था। इन डेढ़ सौ सालों में भारत ने शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में शानदार सफर तय किया है क्योंकि अब करोड़ों की संख्या में लड़कियां शिक्षा प्राप्त कर रही हैं।

### दूसरा पहलू

लेकिन यह तरवीर का एक हिस्सा भर है। पितृसत्तात्मक व्यवस्था किस तरह समाज में जड़ें बिछाए बैठी है, इसकी झलक आप उच्च शैक्षणिक पदों पर देख सकते हैं, जहां महिलाओं का स्वागत आसानी से नहीं होता। यहां आंकड़े चौंकाने वाले ही नहीं, डराने वाले भी हैं। एक स्टडी के मुताबिक भारत में महज 13 महिलाएं वाइस चांसलर यानी कुलपति के पद पर हैं और इनमें से छह महिला विश्वविद्यालयों में कुलपति हैं। इस पद तक पहुंच पाना महिलाओं के लिए कितना चुनौतीपूर्ण होगा, आप समझ सकते हैं। उच्च पदों तक पहुंचने के लिए महिलाओं को न सिर्फ दोगुनी मेहनत करनी पड़ती है बल्कि कई मोर्चों पर एक साथ खुद को साबित भी करना होता है।

देश भर में कुलपति के पद पर महिलाओं की उपस्थिति अगर सिर्फ तीन प्रतिशत तक पहुंच पाई है तो यह आंकड़ा सिलेक्शन सिस्टम पर भी कई सवाल खड़े करता है। या तो महिलाओं की प्रशासनिक क्षमता को लेकर देश में दकियानूसी सोच कायम है, या यह दिखाता है कि वाइस चांसलर सिलेक्शन कमिटी की पसंद पुरुष ही होते हैं, या फिर इस पद तक पहुंचने के लिए सत्ता के साथ जैसे तालमेल की जरूरत होती है, उस में महिलाएं खरी नहीं उतर पातीं।

देश की 42 सेंट्रल यूनिवर्सिटीज सीधे केंद्र के नियंत्रण में हैं। इनमें से सिर्फ दो में महिला वाइस चांसलर हैं। यूजीसी नियमों के अनुसार प्रफेसर के पद पर रहते हुए कम से कम 10 साल का अनुभव होने पर ही किसी को कुलपति के पद के लिए योग्य माना जा सकता है। तो क्या

बेहद कम महिलाएं ही प्रफेसर के पद तक पहुंच पाती हैं? और अगर वे इस पद पर पहुंच भी जाएं तो क्या 10 साल का अनुभव होने से पहले ही रिटायर हो जाती हैं? स्टेट यूनिवर्सिटीज में राज्यों के नियमानुसार कुलपति नियुक्त किया जाता है। कई राज्यों में प्रशासनिक सेवा के अधिकारियों को भी कुलपति का अतिरिक्त प्रभार दे दिया जाता है। लेकिन क्या अतिरिक्त जिम्मेदारी के तौर पर इस पद के साथ वे न्याय कर पाते होंगे? केंद्रीय विश्वविद्यालयों में कुलपति के पद पर नियुक्ति पांच साल के लिए होती है। कुलपति पांच साल के लिए युवा छात्रों के शैक्षणिक भविष्य का कर्ता-धर्ता बन जाता है। क्या एक महिला इस जिम्मेदारी को बखूबी नहीं निभा सकती? क्या वह युवा छात्रों का बेहतर भविष्य नहीं बन सकती? समाज में या सिस्टम में ऐसा क्या है जो महिलाओं को उच्च शैक्षणिक पदों से दूर रखता है? महिलाओं में नेतृत्व क्षमता और संस्थान चलाने की काबिलियत असंदिग्ध है। वैश्विक स्तर पर इसे लेकर कोई दो राय भी नहीं है। वे बेहतरीन शिक्षक होती हैं और प्रशासकीय क्षमता में भी वे कमतर नहीं हैं। फिर भारत में ऐसा क्या खास है कि लेक्चरर पदों पर अच्छी-खासी संख्या में आने के बावजूद महिलाएं शिखर तक नहीं पहुंच पातीं?

प्रफेसर के पदों को ही देखें तो 87,262 पुरुष प्रफेसरों के मुकाबले देश में 29,985 यानी पुरुषों की करीब एक तिहाई महिला प्रफेसर हैं। वहीं एसोसिएट प्रफेसर पदों पर 1,24,631 पुरुषों के मुकाबले 63,965 यानी आधी महिलाएं हैं। असिस्टेंट प्रफेसर यानी लेक्चरर पदों की बात करें तो 5,71,828 पुरुषों के मुकाबले 3,74,349 यानी दो तिहाई महिलाएं हैं। यानी जैसे-जैसे ऊपर के पदों की बारी आती है, महिलाओं की उपस्थिति घटती जाती है। वाइस चांसलर का पद आते-आते वे लगभग लापता हो जाती हैं। क्या महिलाएं पारिवारिक जिम्मेदारियों में उलझे होने के कारण इस होड़ से खुद ही बाहर हो जाती हैं?

### होड़ से बाहर

हाल में महिला साइंस कांग्रेस में केंद्रीय मानव संसाधन विकास मंत्री का बयान समाज के इसी पक्ष को उजागर करता है कि पारिवारिक जिम्मेदारियों का सारा बोझ अक्सर महिलाओं को ही ढोना पड़ता है। एक पुरुष अकेडमिशन की अकेली चिंता करियर होती है लेकिन महिला अकेडमिशन को यह सुविधा उपलब्ध नहीं है। गर्भावस्था और शिशु पालन के वक्त वह अपने पुरुष सहकर्मियों से पिछड़ जाती है और भारतीय समाज इतना लोकतांत्रिक नहीं है कि उदारतापूर्वक इसकी भरपाई करे। जब बात शोध या वैज्ञानिक बनने की हो तो करियर का बलिदान महिला को ही देना पड़ता है। वजह चाहे जो भी हो, रास्ता समाधान की तरफ मुड़ना चाहिए। महिलाओं की प्रशासनिक क्षमता को लेकर सोच और हालात, दोनों में बदलाव जरूरी हैं।



#### PURNIMA SHARMA

A media professional with over fifteen years of experience, Purnima Sharma has worked with organisations like, Aaj Tak, Zee News and DD News and has contributed regularly for reputed media. She takes keen interest in Gender issues and has anchored many prime time shows, live news. Presently, she works with Go News as a Senior Anchor. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Editorial Series

## DIRECTED TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT

*Navbharat Times, March 28, 2016*

*The Bhubaneswar-based Directorate of Research for women in Agriculture's POA for the fairer sex — new techniques, crops, patterns and methodologies for enhancing quality of life and creating employment opportunities*

**W**ith the setting up of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's (ICAR) Directorate of Research for Women in Agriculture (DRWA) in the 1990s in Bhubaneswar, agricultural research began its journey towards gender sensitivity. DRWA scientists work on tissue culture, home science, nutrition, fisheries, horticulture, developing agricultural technologies, farming systems, capacity building, reducing drudgery, and knowledge upgradation by developing different models to come up with solutions to the problems farm women face all over the country. These scientists, mostly women, have assembled from many parts of the country and are names to reckon with in their fields of specialisation. They have come up with innovations and inventions trying and testing them and putting them to use for the benefit of farm women. Each discipline has a specific thrust of research, and these have been knitted together to focus attention on empowerment of women in agriculture to enhance the quality of life of farm families. These projects not only help farm women; they also go a long way in creating employment opportunities for young women who get tagged with the organisation as village-level workers (VLW). Recompensed properly, these

VLWs are mostly girls who have completed basic education and can convince the village farm women about the new techniques, crops, patterns and methodologies.

Developed over a period of two to three years, the models which we will discuss shortly, are implemented in nearby adopted villages and the viability and feasibility options are taken into consideration. Once tested, these models are implemented among farm women through a team led by scientists, technicians and VLWs trained by the Directorate. Depending on the success of these models in the adopted villages, these are recommended to the State governments to be propagated.

## **FOR THE EVES**

'Women' is the watchword around which the work of the department revolves. "We have been successful in developing particular fruit crops and vegetables, for example the pineapple and the pointed gourd, which have been remodelled through tissue culture for the safety of women," says Dr Naresh Babu, a horticulture scientist.

As if understanding our raised eyebrows on the 'safety' part, he adds, "We have developed a variety of pineapple in which the leaves are serrated (without the thorny edges) so that during plucking, mostly done by women, they won't get hurt."

The department has developed resource efficient models in protective farming through mulching (a layer of material applied to soil to increase fertility and reduce growth of weeds) of crops. With respect to mitigating weed growth, the department relies on polythene. "Removing weeds from the crop fields is one of the major tasks of women. Once weeding is controlled through mulching, the problem of deweeding is reduced," he adds. They have proposed lowcost models, which can be effected with home resources. Crediting women with a temperament for biotechnology, Neelam Grewal, director of DRWA is ecstatic about the department's goals — develop a nursery and train women who have done higher secondary or graduation in science for tissue culture, standardise the conditions and then popularise it.

The scientists working in the farm drudgery reduction field have developed two major implements to help farm women. "We have refined 25 implements while developing two - the hand-operated maize dehusker-sheller and vegetable cutter. Maize is a major crop in the State and a lot of effort is put in by women farmers to dehusk it. The vegetable cutter helps reap vegetables like ladies finger, which when done manually causes rashes on the hands of the pluckers," says Dr Jyoti Nayak, Senior Scientist, Family Resources Management. The department works towards reducing occupational health hazards and devises tools and implements. It has developed a pedal husker, which has been sent for field validation to R Udaygiri block in Gajapati district in the State before being recommended to the government.

## **NOT ALL HUNKY DORY**

Neelam who joined the Directorate last July having previously worked as the Dean of Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, is aware of the challenges. "Till very recently, visibility of research activities of the directorate was low. Work was being done but it was limited to the confines of the state boundaries; so commercialisation of technology was pertinent, partnerships needed to be forged, competitive bidding was necessary and equally daunting was

networking with various agencies. During my tenure, I have tried to fill these gaps." Research is a cake walk compared to their efforts to reach the public. After a certain number of models are developed, it becomes the job of the Extension department to do the needful to reach the farm women.

"We are into path breaking research, We not only take things from lab to land but also create awareness, find the means to reach the target, devise the approach and then train the VLWs, a mix of male and females, to disseminate the technology," says Dr Sabita Mishra, Senior Scientist, Agriculture Extension.

To her credit, she has developed an indigenous green leaf vegetable park, from where, women can get their daily nutritional needs and nurture these varieties instead of hunting for them extensively.

"I have also experiments with backyard poultry and it has been successful as a multi-agency participatory model," she adds. While the work done by the scientists is appreciable, most of these projects take two to three years to be developed and tested before reaching the farmers. But that hasn't deterred the DRWA people, especially Dr Abha Singh, Scientist, Food and Nutrition, who has come up with a low-cost baby food that has yielded good results. She has been lavished with praise for the hygienic dry fish production fishery model she helped implement in Puri.

Evident is the happiness in her tone when she gushes, "both projects have been immensely successful and we handed over the dry fish project to a group of fisherwomen who are continuing it in their own way."

So many areas to deal with and so many Projects. But the work environment at DRWA is a happy and enviable one. "I was into teaching all these years despite having always had a strong inclination towards research. Work is challenging but satisfying. As ICAR's motto is farmers first, we work here with the motto of farm women first," says Neelam. With the potential in the agricultural field, for Neelam and her colleagues "there is nothing more satisfying than finding a solution to problems through extensive research and that is exactly what we have been trying to do."

DR SABITA MISHRA, Senior Scientist, Agriculture Extension  
RESEARCH PROJECTS: Gender sensitive extension model, indigenous green leaf vegetable park and backyard poultry.

My inclination towards research developed during my PhD. As I had interacted with villagers during my tenure as KVK training officer, I was abreast of the problems women face in agriculture. So it was always in my

mind to help farm women, who dominate our agriculture sector, and come up with solutions that can mitigate their occupational health hazards.

DR NARESH BABU, Scientist, Horticulture

RESEARCH PROJECTS: Developing friendly crops through tissue culture, measures for protective farming and resource efficient models.

Research is something that benefits farmers directly. Since my university days, I was sure about wanting to be in this field so that I could find out what best helps the farmers. And since women play a major role in farming in India, giving them solutions to their problems will be helpful for a vast majority. The scope for research is endless.

DR JYOTI NAYAK, Senior scientist, Family Resource Management

RESEARCH PROJECTS: Refined 25 tools and developed Maize Sheller and Vegetable cutter.

After MSc in Home Science from Agra University, I worked with Integrated Child Development Services as an instructor and then joined the Central Rice Research Institute, Cuttack, as extension-cum-research officer. For any discipline to grow, research is important. I had been seeing women farmers facing problems in the workfield, even in the household environment. I was inclined to work on farm drudgery reduction at the farmers' level, skill management and find solution for lack of market linkage and other constraints. The requirement of farm women as far as tools were concerned was immense. So I took up research to provide a solution to these problems.

GAYATRI MAHARANA: Scientist, Home Science

RESEARCH PROJECTS: Ergonomic evaluation of selected manually operated farm equipment in mango and cashewnut.

As I qualified as an Agricultural Research Service officer, I was always prepared to get into research and I could not have got a better platform than this to pursue something of my interest .

DR ABHA SINGH, Scientist, Food and Nutrition

RESEARCH PROJECTS: low cost baby food and hygienic dry fish production fishery model

It is only after I got into research work that I got hooked on various projects. My husband is also into research, so it was a natural choice for me and the prospect of growth was good.



### Dope on DRWA

The DRWA was established as National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture on the recommendation of the Working Group on Agricultural Research and Education constituted by the Planning Commission for the formulation of the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97). The institute was upgraded to the Directorate of Research on Women in Agriculture during the XI Plan. Since its inception, DRWA has been in the forefront of undertaking research on issues affecting women in agriculture. It has focused on participatory action research in different technology-based theme areas involving rural women to test suitability of technologies for women and suggest their refinement. ICAR has merged the All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) on Home Science with National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (NRCWA) in XI plan period (2007). The All India Coordinated Research Project on Home Science alias DRWAs are running in 10 centres of nine states of the country.



#### **KASTURI RAY**

An Alumna of IIMC, Kasturi Ray writes on issues of gender, education, environment. After a long stint with New Indian Express she is presently freelancing alongwith pursuing her PhD in English. She is also a visiting faculty at Birla Global University. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best Feature

## सवाल महिला पत्रकारों की सुरक्षा का?

*Vividha Features, July 12, 2014*

**"ब**

हुत मजबूत हूँ मैं। सारी जिंदगी मेहनत की। संघर्ष किया। हर परेशानी से पार पाने की कोशिश करते-करते यहां तक पहुंची लेकिन आज बहुत मजबूर महसूस कर रही हूँ। अपने सपनों को टूटते देखना, जिंदगी को एक ही झटके में सड़क पर देखना इतना भी आसां नहीं होता। जो लोग सारी जिंदगी अपने ख्वाबों को पूरा करने के लिए मेहनत करते हैं और जो जान लगा देते हैं उनके लिए एक सुबह अपने बिखरे सपनों के साथ उठना मौत से कम नहीं। इंडिया टीवी ने जो कुछ किया मेरे साथ वो एक भयानक सपने से कम नहीं। प्रसाद सर मैं आपको कभी माफ नहीं करूंगी। अनीता शर्मा आपके लिए तो शब्द ही नहीं है। एक औरत होकर भी आप ऐसा कर सकती है। अफसोस रहेगा कि मैंने इंडिया टीवी जॉइन किया और ऐसे लोगों के साथ काम किया जो विश्वासघात करते हैं, षड्यंत्र करते हैं।" इंडिया टीवी की एंकर तनु शर्मा ने अपने फेसबुक वॉल पर लिखे गए सुसाइड नोट में अपने साथ हुए मानसिक उत्पीड़न की दास्तान का कुछ इस तरह बयां किया। वह चैनल में दो वरिष्ठ अधिकारियों के द्वारा किए जा रहे उत्पीड़न को लेकर तनाव में थी। उसने 22 जून को इंडिया टीवी कार्यालय के बाहर नशीला पदार्थ खाकर आत्महत्या का प्रयास किया था। हालांकि समय रहते अस्पताल पहुंचाने के कारण उसकी जान बचा ली गई।

देश के एक राष्ट्रीय समाचार चैनल की एक एंकर का खुद खबर बन जाना दुखदायी है और सोचनीय भी। चैनल के सामने ही उसने आत्महत्या की कोशिश की और चैनल प्रबंधन पर सवाल खड़े किए। चैनल प्रबंधन के आपराधिक, गैर जिम्मेदाराना और उत्पीड़नकारी रुख के चलते तनु शर्मा को खुदकुशी की कोशिश के लिए मजबूर होना पड़ा। घटना के बाद दोषियों के खिलाफ कार्रवाई की जगह चैनल प्रबंधन उन्हें बचाने में जुट गया है। चैनल की तरफ से तनु शर्मा पर ही आत्महत्या की कोशिश का मामला दर्ज करवा दिया गया जिसके बाद तनु ने भी 26 जून को पुलिस को लिखित में अपना बयान दिया। बयान के मुताबिक 5 फरवरी 2014 को चैनल ज्वाइन करने के बाद से ही तनु के वरिष्ठों ने उसे परेशान करना शुरू कर दिया था। तनु शर्मा ने पुलिस को दिए चार पेज लंबे स्वहस्ताक्षरित बयान में लिखा है कि फरवरी में नियुक्ति के बाद पहले तो अनीता शर्मा ने उसकी तारीफ करते हुए उसे अपने जाल में फंसाना चाहा। वो उसकी तारीफ में उसके अंगों के बारे में टिप्पणी करती। कहती थी कि उसका शरीर बहुत खुबसूरत है और इसे वो अपने आगे बढ़ने के लिए इस्तेमाल कर सकती है। तनु शर्मा को कार्यस्थल पर लगातार बेईज्जत और प्रताड़ित किया जा रहा था। साथ ही शारीरिक संबंध बनाकर आगे बढ़ने जैसे तरीके बताए जाते थे। तनु शर्मा ने अपने साथ हो रहे मानसिक उत्पीड़न के बारे में कई बार चैनल प्रबंधक को लिखित में शिकायत की लेकिन इसके बावजूद उसकी कोई मदद नहीं की। अपने बयान में तनु शर्मा ने कई जगह लिखा है कि उसकी जिंदगी इन लोगों ने मिलकर नरक बना दी है। आखिरकार तंग आकर तनु शर्मा ने आत्महत्या का प्रयास किया। इस मामले में सबसे संदेहास्पद भूमिका पुलिस की रही है और किसी भी तरह की मिलीभगत से इंकार नहीं किया जा सकता है। तनु शर्मा के बयान की कॉपी में स्पष्ट दिख जाता है कि उसने किन-किन लोगों के नाम लिए हैं और किन-किन पर आरोप लगाया है। तीन लोगों को अपनी मौत का जिम्मेदार बताते हुए आत्महत्या का प्रयास करने के पूर्व लिखे

गए सुसाइड नोट में लिखा है कि रितु धवन, अनीता शर्मा विष्ट और एमएन प्रसाद के उत्पीड़न और असहयोग से क्षुब्ध होकर वो आत्महत्या कर रही है। बाद में पुलिस को दिए बयान में भी उसने इन्हीं तीनों पर असहयोग, प्रताड़ित करने और कार्यस्थल पर गरिमापूर्ण व्यवहार न करने का आरोप लगाया है। कानूनन ये किसी के खिलाफ एफआईआर करने के लिए काफी होता है, लेकिन पुलिस के लिए शायद ये पर्याप्त नहीं था इसलिए उसने रितु धवन को ऊंची पहुंच और रसूख का लाभ देते हुए एफआईआर की जद से बाहर रखा। इतना ही नहीं, इसके बाद पीड़िता तनु शर्मा पर ही धाराएं लगाकर उसे जेल भेजे जाने की साजिश होने लगी है।

अब तक इस घटनाक्रम में राजनीतिक संरक्षण, पुलिस की लापरवाही, लीपापोती और कानूनी कार्यवाही का डर दिखा कर मामले को पूरी तरह से जनता की पहुंच से दूर रखा गया है ताकि ये संवेदनशील मुद्दा जनक्रोध से दूर रहे। यहां तक कि इस मामले में इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया भी उदासीनता बरत रहा है। इलेक्ट्रॉनिक मीडिया की तरफ से अब तक इस खबर को प्रसारित ही नहीं किया गया है। प्रिंट मीडिया में जरूर कुछ समाचार पत्रों ने इस मामले से जुड़ी खबरें प्रकाशित की हैं। इस मामले में मीडिया की खुद की चुप्पी सवाल खड़े करती है। लगता है इस मामले में प्रतिद्वंद्विता को दरकिनार करते हुए एक आपसी सहमति की स्थिति में दिख रहे हैं, जिसमें एक दूसरे की गलतियां छिपाने का अलिखित समझौता किया गया है। हालांकि सोशल मीडिया के माध्यम से कुछ वरिष्ठ मीडियाकर्मियों ने तनु शर्मा को न्याय दिलाने की मुहिम छेड़ी है। इस मुहिम में समाज सेवी, छात्र, मजदूर यूनियन से जुड़े कार्यकर्ता और अनेक लोग शामिल हो रहे हैं। सोशल मीडिया और न्यूज पोर्टल के माध्यम से इस मामले से जुड़ी खबरें लगातार आ रही हैं। जर्नलिस्ट्स यूनियन फॉर सिविल सोसाइटी (जेयूसीएस) ने तनु शर्मा के साथ हुए मानसिक उत्पीड़न और दुर्व्यवहार की निंदा की है। कहा है तनु शर्मा ने पुलिस को जो बयान दिया वह लोकतंत्र के चौथे स्तंभ के पीछे की छिपी हुई गंदगी को उजागर करता है। जेयूसीएस ने इस पूरे प्रकरण की सीबीआई जांच की मांग की गई ताकि यह साफ हो जाए कि आखिर वे कौन से राजनेता और उद्योगपति हैं जिनके पास इंडिया टीवी अपने महिला पत्रकारों को भेजने की कोशिश करता था। जेयूसीएस ने प्रेस काउंसिल ऑफ इंडिया से मांग की है कि वह इस पूरे प्रकरण को गंभीरता से लेते हुए मीडिया संस्थानों में महिला पत्रकारों के यौन उत्पीड़न पर एक उच्चस्तरीय जांच आयोग बनाए और इस पर निश्चित समयावधि के अंदर अपनी रिपोर्ट रखे।

बहरहाल, मीडिया में काम की जगह पर प्रताड़ना के आरोपों से जुड़ा ये पहला मामला नहीं है। साल 2013 में इंटरनेशनल न्यूज सेपटी इंस्टीट्यूट और इंटरनेशनल वीमेंस मीडिया फाउंडेशन ने दुनियाभर की 875 महिला पत्रकारों के साथ एक सर्वे किया। सर्वे के मुताबिक करीब दो-तिहाई महिला मीडियाकर्मियों ने काम के सिलसिले में धमकी और बदसलूकी झेली है। ज्यादातर मामलों में जिम्मेदार पुरुष सहकर्मी थे। तनु शर्मा मामला एक बार फिर याद दिलाता है कि मीडिया संस्थानों में युवा महिला पत्रकार कितनी सुरक्षित हैं और उन्हें किस माहौल में काम करना पड़ता है।



#### **BABULAL NAGA**

Babulal Naga is presently media coordinator at Vividha Features. He has earlier contributed to various newspapers of Rajasthan. He also has been the resource person in various training and capacity building programs for rural youth in the field of rural journalism. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15-Jury Appreciation Certificate

## WHERE ARE THE WOMEN

*www.newslaundry.com, December 5, 2014*

**P**rominent English newspapers have for long championed the cause of women's reservation in Parliament, detailing how a Bill is needed to ensure representation of women in the national legislature. It seems, however, that they have done little to ensure adequate female representation on their pages.

For three months, starting August, 2014, Newslaundry painstakingly reviewed four leading English newspapers to gauge the number of male and female contributors. And the results don't exactly paint a pretty picture: 73 per cent of the 8,681 articles examined were written by men. While women contributed to 27 per cent of the articles. Which means that for every one article written by a woman, there were about three pieces written by men.

The papers examined were the Delhi editions of The Times of India (TOI), The Hindustan Times (HT), The Hindu and The Indian Express. TOI, The Hindu and HT are the country's top papers - in terms of circulation - in that order, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

The Indian Express does not figure in the top five most widely circulated newspapers but was added to the list considering the impact it has owing to its readership in policy circles. It would be fair to state that together the four papers set the agenda for the government and national discourse. And even as they dissect other establishments on issues of gender equality, our research shows that they don't quite pass the test themselves.

### **NOT UP FRONT**

According to the numbers thrown up by our survey, few women seem to make it to the front page. In HT, women made up only 18 per cent of the bylines, while the figure stood at 28 per cent for both The Indian Express and TOI. The Hindu was close to achieving parity with 40 per cent of their articles written by women.

On the edit and op-ed pages, too, men accounted for most of the bylines, with HT again faring the worst -- women accounted for just 20 per cent of the bylines. The situation is better in the city pages, with The Hindu having more women contributors at 58 per cent.

Notably, all four papers have male editor-in-chiefs. In *The Hindu*, though, Editor Malini Parthasarathy is in charge for all practical purposes. There's never been a survey conducted to determine the composition of Indian newsrooms but women journalists in the industry testify that the editorial rooms are, in fact, overflowing with men, even as women comprise 50 per cent of the national population.

"Given that there are very few women editors in the top positions of power, newsroom culture is invariably masculine. This is borne out by 'male' conversations and sexist jokes heard in the newsroom," says Monobina Gupta, edit page editor at DNA. The fact that the top echelons in these organisations are dominated by men would tend to automatically rule out active intervention by women editors in the choice of news – particularly front-page news.

Most journalists we spoke to agree that sexism in a male-dominated office in the media plays out subtly. "Out of the seven bosses I have worked for so far, four were women. All four were deeply respected in the newsroom, wielded great authority and, to the best of my knowledge, never encountered a challenge that had anything to do with their gender. The only big (and worrying) difference I saw while discussing our female and male bosses outside of work is how personal attacks can get while talking about women heads. If she is a hard taskmaster or a slave driver, it 'must' be because she is unmarried (out of the four, two were single)," says a reporter working in a prominent news daily, not willing to be named.

"Oh, and the kind of rumours that swirl around the personal lives of single, female bosses. It can get vicious, at times," she adds.

A journalist working for a financial daily states that in the two newspapers she has worked for in over eight years, though there seemed to be many women journalists at the junior and mid-level, the most senior positions were almost entirely held by men. "I have felt that the print media does not discriminate while hiring initially but something seems to be happening along the way that results in mostly men occupying the top jobs."

In terms of pay, the perception, for good reason, is that women get paid less. "Women, and there are a few exceptions, do earn 20 per cent less than their male counterparts though they may be doing the same work. It is not rocket science -- that perceptions and qualitative importance attached to the work that men do, also get quantitatively translated, for the benefit of the male colleagues," says Anuradha Raman, Associate Editor, *Outlook*.

## 'SOFT' VERSUS 'HARD' BEATS

The gender gap becomes more distinct when you look at beats like sport, crime, national security (includes stories on the Central Bureau of Investigation, home and defence ministry and so on) and business. Our survey shows that the business pages of the four papers combined had only 28 per cent women writing for them. The sport pages had only four per cent. Beats like crime, governance and policy and foreign policy, too, had a small percentage of women writing for them. Are women then still confined to reporting on what are traditionally looked on as so-called "soft" beats and women's issues?

"The sub-text of beat allocation has always reflected some sort of gender division. For instance, how many male journalists are given beats like HRD [Human Resource Development] or ministry for women and children? Similarly, very few women follow the so-called 'hard' beats like home ministry, defence, Intelligence Bureau, finance and so on. Since newsroom culture tends to be highly sexist, editors should make it a point to get male reporters to cover the 'soft'/feminised beats," says Gupta. Another journalist working in a features team of a national daily says she is not sure whether beats get assigned based on gender, but it is "damn hard to get a male feature writer".

Hoot Editor Sevanti Ninan says that there are many women writing on sport, business and policy, and many are doing hardcore interviews on business news channels if you take the media industry as a whole. "Women cover political parties in most newspapers. If you are looking for missing women in the Indian media, you need to look at the regional press, particularly Hindi," she adds.

Raman concurs: "Some of the finest business journalists have been women and there are a lot of them in pink newspapers now."

It must be stated here that, though we would have liked this survey to be more elaborate and cover all English dailies to present a definitive picture of gender representation in the English print media, our resources did not permit us to do so. The survey should, then, be viewed as a primer to the dismal state of representation of women in the news media. And the bigger picture, if you go by the trend here, will only be starker.



### MANISHA PANDE

Manisha Pande is a Senior Editor with Newslaundry and her writing focusses on the media and the biases that operate within the sector but are rarely reported on. Through her work she hopes to start conversations about the media that is supposed to expose inequality but is hobbled by the same forces of class and privilege that perpetuate injustice in society. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best web News Report

## खेती में लिंगभेद के बीज

*Tehelka Patrika, April 30, 2016*

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म सब अपने जीवन में कुछ सालों के लिए स्कूल गए हैं, वहाँ हमने अपना देश भारत या हमारा देश भारत विषय पर निबंध जरूर लिखा होगा. यह निबंध एक किस्म के आध्यात्मिक अनुष्ठान की तरह होता था, लिखा ही होगा. जहाँ तक मुझे याद है इसका एक शुरुआती वक्तव्य होता था – भारत एक कृषि प्रधान देश है। निबंध का विषय आज भी बना हुआ है, किन्तु यह वक्तव्य मृत्यु शैया पर पड़ा हुआ है। अब भी जबकि भारत की 48.17 करोड़ की कामकाजी जनसँख्या में से 26.30 करोड़ लोग खेती पर सीधे-सीधे निर्भर हैं (जनगणना 2011), वहाँ विकास की नीति का मूल मकसद यह है कि खेती क्षेत्र से लोगों को बाहर निकलना है. तर्क यह है कि खेती पर बहुत ज्यादा बोझ है और लोगों के दूसरे क्षेत्रों में रोजगार खोजना चाहिए. ऐसे में पांच अहम बातों को छिपा कर रखा जाता है –

1. यदि लोग खेती छोड़ेंगे तो कंपनियों/औद्योगिक समूहों को इसमें निर्णायक दखल देने का मौका मिल जाएगा।
2. जब खेतिहर समाज उत्पादन से दूर होगा, तो वह अपनी खाद्य सुरक्षा की जरूरतों को पूरा करने के लिए वह बाजार में आएगा, जहाँ उसे राज्य का संरक्षण प्राप्त नहीं होगा. उसकी जिंदगी ठेके पर संचालित होगी।
3. कृषि एक व्यापक व्यवस्था है, जिसमें प्राकृतिक संसाधनों (जंगल, पशुधन, जल स्रोत, जमीन, पहाड़ आदि) का जुड़ाव अन्तर्निहित है. जब समाज का रिश्ता खेती से टूट जाएगा, तब इन संसाधनों का खनिज सम्पदा और भीमकाय औद्योगिकीकरण के लिए “बेतहाशा” शोषण करना आसान हो जाएगा।
4. जब हम समाज को संगठित और असंगठित क्षेत्र में बाँटते हैं, तब हम यह भूल जाते हैं कि समाज अपने आप में असंगठित नहीं है। जब राज्य अपने दायरे का व्यापक तौर पर विस्तार करके खेती-संसाधनों-सामाजिक व्यवहार को अपने कब्जे में कर लेने की नीति पर काम करता है। तब समाज का सबसे ज्यादा संगठित हिस्सा अपने आप असंगठित की श्रेणी में आ जाता है, क्योंकि उसका अपने संसाधनों पर नियंत्रण खत्म हो जाता है. और एक समूह, जो हमेशा इस फिराक में रहता है कि किस तरह से सामाजिक-आर्थिक-प्राकृतिक संसाधनों पर नियंत्रण हासिल किया जाए, वह एकदम से “संगठित” क्षेत्र का आकार ले लेता है।
5. जब यह सवाल पूछा जाता है कि रोजगार कहाँ हैं और सरकार क्यों आजीविका सुरक्षा नहीं करती; तो अचानक विवादित बयान आने लगते हैं, दंगे भड़क जाते हैं और मीडिया मूल सवाल छिपा देता है. जरा खुले नजरिए से देखिये, पायेंगे कि खेती को भी हमारे समाज ने लैंगिक भेदभाव से मुक्त नहीं छोड़ा है. जरा नजर डाल कर देखिये कि खेत में महिलाओं की मौजूदगी कितनी होती है और कृषि उत्पाद को बेचने के लिए बाजार में कितनी!

ऐसा नहीं है कि खेती में सब कुछ अच्छा ही चलता रहा है. वहाँ भी कुछ मूल विषय छिपाए जाते रहे हैं। भारत देश पर लिखे जाने वाले अपने निबंधों में हमने भी शायद यह कभी उल्लेख नहीं किया होगा कि खेती और उससे जुड़े कामों में हमारे घर-समाज की महिलाओं की भूमिका सबसे अहम रही है। इस नजरिए पर कोई शंका नहीं की जा सकती है कि जिस तरह की भूमिका महिलाओं ने कृषि में निभाई है, उनके बिना खेती के होना और बने रहने की कल्पना भी नहीं की जा सकती है।

## श्रम का असमान विभाजन और लैंगिक आधार पर अमान्यता

भारत में कुल कामकाजी महिलाओं में से 84 प्रतिशत महिलायें कृषि उत्पादन और सम्बंधित कार्यों से आजीविका अर्जित करती हैं। चाय उत्पादन में लगने वाले श्रम में 47 प्रतिशत, कपास उत्पादन में 48.84 प्रतिशत, तिलहन उत्पादन में 45.43 प्रतिशत और सब्जियों के उत्पादन में 39.13 प्रतिशत का सीधा योगदान महिलाओं का होता है (ईयु-एफटीए एंड द लाइकली इम्पेक्ट आन इन्डियन विमेनय सेंटर फार ट्रेड एंड डेवलपमेंट)। मानव समाज में श्रम के असमान बंटवारे और उसके भेदभाव मूलक महत्त्व के निर्धारण के जरिये लैंगिक भेदभाव को स्थापित किया गया है। खेती के घरेलू काम में महिलायें सबसे ज्यादा श्रम वाला काम करती हैं, किन्तु उनके काम को पहचान नहीं दी जाती है और उस काम के जरिये किये जाने वाले आर्थिक योगदान को "नगण्य" मान लिया जाता है। समय के उपयोग पर किये गए अध्ययन से पता चलता है कि भारतीय महिलायें सप्ताह में 25 घंटे अपने घर के काम के लिए श्रम करती हैं। इसके साथ ही पांच घंटे देखभाल और सामुदायिक काम में लगाती हैं (रोल आफ फार्म विमेन इन एग्रीकल्चर एंड लेसंस लर्नडय सेज पब्लिकेशन). इसके बाद वे 30 घंटे "बिना भुगतान का श्रम" करती हैं।

दुनिया का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा बाजार बन चुके भारत देश में अब तक घरेलू जिम्मेदारियां निभाने के लिए किये गए श्रम और काम को नीतिगत स्तर पर कोई सामाजिक-आर्थिक मान्यता नहीं मिली है। पहले समाज तय करता है कि घर का काम करना स्त्री की जिम्मेदारी है और फिर यह तय भी कर दिया जाता है कि इस काम का कोई "मोल" नहीं होगा। लेकिन यह जानना दिलचस्प होगा कि यदि आर्थिक पैमानों पर समाज में महिलाओं के नियमित घरेलू काम का ही आंकलन करें तो प्रचलित कुशल मजदूरी की न्यूनतम दर (भारत के राज्यों की औसत मजदूरी) के आधार पर उनके काम का सालाना आर्थिक मूल्य (16.29 लाख करोड़ रूपए) भारत सरकार के सालाना बजट (वर्ष 2013-14 के बजट का संशोधित अनुमान 15.90 लाख करोड़ रूपए था) से अधिक होता है।

यह काम करने वालों के लिए कोई अवकाश नहीं होता है। यह समूह संगठित और असंगठित श्रम की अवधारणाओं से ऊपर है। 16 करोड़ महिलाओं का मुख्य काम "घर की जिम्मेदारियां" निभाना है। इसे हमारे समाज में भावनात्मक काम के रूप में प्रस्तुत किया जाता है, इसलिए कभी ये "श्रमिक" हड़ताल पर नहीं जाते हैं। परन्तु आप कल्पना कीजिये कि यदि इनकी हड़ताल हो तो क्या होगा? घर में खाना न बनेगा, सफाई न होगी, बच्चों की देखभाल न हो पाएगी, कपडे न धुल पायेंगे,





मेहमान-नवाजी न हो पाएगी; इस तर्क को लैंगिक भेदभाव के नजरिए से न भी देखें, तो भी उस भूमिका को मान्यता दी जानी चाहिए। उनके इस योगदान को खारिज करने का मतलब है घरेलू श्रम की उपेक्षा और महिलाओं के सामाजिक-आर्थिक न्याय के हकों का सुनियोजित उल्लंघन।

हमारी कुल जनसँख्या को दो भागों में बांटा जाता है – कार्यशील जनसँख्या और अकार्यशील जनसँख्या। जो पूरे समय या अंशकालिक रूप से आर्थिक उत्पादन से जुड़े हैं, वे कार्यशील हो माने जाते हैं। अकार्यशील जनसँख्या वह मानी गयी जिसने किसी तरह का काम नहीं किया। इसमें विद्यार्थी, भिखारी, आवारा और घरेलू जिम्मेदारी निभाने वाला समूह आता है। जनगणना 2011 के मुताबिक भारत में कुल 72.89 करोड़ लोगों को अकार्यशील माना गया है। आधिकारिक परिभाषा के मुताबिक ये वो लोग हैं जिन्होंने सन्दर्भ समय में कोई और किसी भी तरह का काम नहीं किया है। ये वो लोग हैं, जिनके काम या गतिविधि को आर्थिक योगदान करने वाली गतिविधि नहीं माना जाता है। इन 72.89 करोड़ अकार्यशील लोगों में से 16.56 करोड़ लोग ऐसे हैं जिनके जीवन में मुख्य काम “घरेलू जिम्मेदारियाँ” निभाना रहा है। सबसे उल्लेखनीय तथ्य यह है कि इनमें से 15.99 करोड़ यानी 96.50 फीसदी महिलायें हैं। ताजा जनगणना 2011 के आंकड़ों से पता चलता है कि मुख्य काम के तौर पर केवल 34.49 लाख पुरुष (3.5 प्रतिशत) ही घरेलू जिम्मेदारियाँ निभाते हैं। महिलायें घरेलू जिम्मेदारियाँ (खाना, बर्तन, कपड़े धोना, देखभाल, पानी भरना, सफाई आदि) निभाती हैं, पर उन्हें कामगार नहीं माना गया।

महिला हकों के लिए संघर्षरत संगठन यह साबित कर चुके हैं कि हर महिला कामकाजी है, फिर वह चाहे आय अर्जित करने के लिए श्रम करे या फिर परिवार-घर को चलाने-बनाने के लिए। इस हिसाब से मातृत्व हक हर महिला का हक है। माउंटैन रिसर्च जर्नल में उत्तराखंड के गढ़वाल हिमालय अंचल का एक अध्ययन प्रकाशित हुआ था। इसका विषय था – परिवार की खाद्य और आर्थिक सुरक्षा में महिलाओं का योगदान। इस अध्ययन के दौरान महिलाओं ने अध्ययनकर्ताओं से कहा कि वे कोई काम नहीं करती हैं, पर जब विश्लेषण किया गया तो पता चला कि परिवार के पुरुष औसतन 9 घंटे काम कर रहे थे, जबकि महिलाएं 16 घंटे काम कर रही थीं। यदि तात्कालिक सरकारी दर पर उनके काम के लिए न्यूनतम भुगतान किया जाता तो पुरुष को 128 रूपए प्रतिदिन और महिला को 228 रूपए प्रतिदिन प्राप्त होत।

जब इनमें से कुछ कामों की कीमत का आंकलन बाजार भाव से किया गया तो पता चला कि लकड़ी, चारे, शहद, पानी और सब्जी लाने के लिए साल भर में परिवार को 34168 रूपए खर्च करने पड़ते।

### **कृषि और महिलायें यानी बेदखली**

पूरे भारत में महिलायें खेती के लिए जमीन तैयार करने, बीज चुनने, अंकुरण संभालने, बुआई करने, खाद बनाने, खरपतवार निकालने, रोपाई, निदाई-गुड़ाई, भूसा सूपने और फसल की कटाई का काम करती हैं। वे ऐसे कई काम करती हैं, जो सीधे खेत से जुड़े हुए नहीं हैं, पर कृषि क्षेत्र से सम्बंधित हैं। मसलन पशुपालन का लगभग पूरा काम उनके जिम्मे होता है। जहाँ मछली पालन होता है, वहाँ उनकी भूमिका बहुत अहम होती है। घर के लिए जलाऊ लकड़ी, पशुओं के लिए घांस, परिवार के लिए लघु वन उपज, पीने का पानी समेत हर काम में महिलाओं की श्रम भूमिका केन्द्रीय है; किन्तु उसका सम्मान और पहचान नहीं है। इस सबके बावजूद उन्हें किसान का दर्जा नहीं मिलता है। खेती के काम में लिए जाने वाले निर्णयों में

उनकी सहभागिता लगातार कम हुई है; खास तौर पर तबसे, जबसे संकर बीजों, रासयनिक उर्वरकों—कीटनाशकों के उपयोग और मशीनीकरण की व्यवस्था खेती की स्थानीय तकनीकों पर हावी हुई है।

बाजार की परिभाषा में किसान होने की पहचान इस बात से तय होती है कि जमीन का आर्थिक मालिक कौन है? इस बात से नहीं कि उसमें श्रम किसका लग रहा है!

फरवरी 2014 में जारी हुई कृषि जनगणना (2010–11) की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक भारत में मौजूदा स्थिति में केवल 12.78 प्रतिशत कृषि जोतें महिलाओं के नाम पर हैं। स्वाभाविक है कि इस कारण से वे “कृषि क्षेत्र” में निर्णायक भूमिका नहीं हैं। यह महज एक प्रशासनिक मामला नहीं है कि जमीन की कागज पर किसका नाम है; वास्तव में यह एक आर्थिक—राजनीतिक विषय है, जिस पर सरकार कानूनी पहल नहीं कर रही है, क्योंकि उसका चरित्र भी तो पितृ-सत्तात्मक ही है।

समाज जानता है कि पुरुषों की तुलना में खेती महिलाओं के लिए संसाधन से ज्यादा सम्मान, जिम्मेदारी और भावनाओं का केंद्र है। यदि उनका नियंत्रण बढ़ेगा, तो उन्नत खेती के नाम पर होने वाले प्रयोगों पर वे ज्यादा सवाल करेंगी और तात्कालिक लाभ के लिए जमीनों के व्यापार का विरोध करेंगी। कृषि जनगणना के मुताबिक भारत में वर्ष 2005–06 में कृषि जोतों की संख्या 12.92 करोड़ थी। जो वर्ष 2010–11 में बढ़ कर 13.83 करोड़ हो गयी, लेकिन कृषि भूमि में तो इजाफा हुआ नहीं। वास्तव में भूमि सुधार न होने और असमान वितरण के बाद अब भूमि अधिग्रहण के कारण जोतों के आकार लगातार छोटे हो रहे हैं। वर्ष 1970–71 में भारत में जोतों का औसत आकार 2.28 हेक्टेयर था, जो वर्ष 2010–11 में घट कर 1.15 हेक्टेयर रह गया है। कुल किसानों में से 85.01 प्रतिशत किसान वे हैं, जिनके पास 2 हेक्टेयर से कम जमीन है, जो छोटे और सीमान्त किसान कहलाते हैं। ऐसी स्थिति में जरूरी हो जाता है कि समाज उन तकनीकों से खेती करे, जिनसे उत्पादन बढ़े, किन्तु मिट्टी और उसकी उर्वरता को नुकसान न पहुंचे। हरित क्रान्ति के जरिये थोपी गयी तकनीकों, बीजों, रसायनों के कारण छोटी जोतों पर खेती करना नुकसानदायक “कर्म” होता गया। जरा सोचिये कि जब 85 प्रतिशत किसान छोटे और मझौले हों, तब क्या खेती को प्रत्यक्ष या अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से बड़ी कारपोरेट कंपनियों के हवाले किया जाना उचित और नैतिक है?

### कृषि की मौजूदा स्थिति

21वीं सदी का पहला दशक हमारे समाज के लिए बहुत बड़ी चुनौतियां लाया है। सरकार उस नीति में सफल होती दिखाई दे रही है, जिसे लागू करके वह खेती से लोगों को दूर करना चाहती थी। इस शुरुआती दशक में भारत में कुल कामकाजी जनसंख्या में 8 करोड़ का इजाफा हुआ, किन्तु खेती से जुड़े लोगों को अपने आजीविका के संसाधन त्यागने पड़े। वर्ष 2001 में भारत में 12.73 करोड़ लोग किसान की श्रेणी में आते थे, यानी कृषि उत्पादन का काम कर रहे थे। वर्ष 2011 में इनकी संख्या में 86.2 लाख की कमी आई। हर रोज 2368 किसानों को खेती का साथ छोड़ना पड़ा।

अकेले उत्तरप्रदेश में 31 लाख किसानों ने खेती छोड़ी। पंजाब में 13 लाख, हरियाणा में 5.37 लाख, बिहार में 9.97 लाख, मध्यप्रदेश में 11.93 लाख और आन्ध्र प्रदेश में 13.68 लाख किसानों ने खेती को त्यागा। इसका दूसरा पहलू ज्यादा भयावह और दर्दनाक है। इन्ही दस सालों में खेतिहर मजदूरों की संख्या में 3.75 करोड़ की बढ़ौतरी हुई। महाशक्ति का मुखौटा ओढ़ रहा भारत हर घंटे 430 कृषि मजदूर पैदा करता है। उत्तरप्रदेश में दस सालों में कृषि मजदूरों की

संख्या में 1.25 करोड़ का इजाफा हुआ। बिहार में 49.27 लाख, आन्ध्र प्रदेश में 31.35 लाख, मध्यप्रदेश में 47.91 लाख कृषि मजदूरों की संख्या बढ़ी है।

### **कृषि क्षेत्र में महिलायें**

व्यापक तौर पर समाज में महिलाओं की स्थिति को जांचने के लिए एक महत्वपूर्ण पैमाना है उनकी सहभागिता और उनके योगदान को मान्यता दिया जाना। जब हम कृषि क्षेत्र में लगी जनसँख्या (जो श्रम कर रहे हैं, उनकी संख्या) में महिलाओं की संख्या का आंकलन करते हैं, तब पता चलता है कि कृषि क्षेत्र में आये संकट का उन पर गहरा असर पड़ा है।

### **किसान (उत्पादक)**

**किसानी का श्रम करने वालों में महिलायें** – इसमें कोई शक नहीं रह जाता है कि कृषि में महिलाओं की बराबर की भूमिका और योगदान है, पर उन्हें पहचान नहीं दी जाती है। वर्ष 2001 में भारत में 12.73 करोड़ किसान (कृषि उत्पादक) थे। इनमें से 4.19 करोड़ (33 प्रतिशत) महिलायें थीं। वर्ष 2011 में कृषि क्षेत्र में महिलाओं की संख्या में और कमी आई और यह घट कर 3.60 करोड़ (30.3 प्रतिशत) रह गयी।

राज्य की स्थिति देखने पर हमें पता चलता है कि खाद्यान्न उत्पादन में नाम कमाने वाले पंजाब में कृषि श्रम करने वालों में केवल 14.6 प्रतिशत महिलायें थी। यह संख्या भी दस सालों में घट कर 9.36 रह गयी। मध्यप्रदेश में 37.6 प्रतिशत महिलाएं किसान थीं, जो घट कर 33 प्रतिशत रह गयीं। बहरहाल इससे हम अंतिम रूप से यह निष्कर्ष भी नहीं निकाल सकते हैं कि मुख्य काम के रूप में पंजाब में महिलायें किसानों का काम नहीं कर रही हैं; इसका मतलब यह है कि किसान के रूप में उनकी भूमिका और योगदान को पहचाना नहीं जा रहा है। हमें यह ध्यान रहना होगा कि उच्च सामाजिक-आर्थिक तबकों में महिलाओं का अस्तित्व तुलनात्मक रूप से ज्यादा उपेक्षित होता है।

वर्ष 2001 में किसानों का काम करने वालों में सबसे बेहतर स्थिति राजस्थान (46 प्रतिशत महिलायें) और महारष्ट्र (43.4 प्रतिशत महिलायें) की थी। इन दोनों राज्यों में भी महिला किसानों की संख्या में कमी आई है।

**खेती छोड़ने वालों में महिलायें ज्यादा** – इन दस सालों में जिन 86.20 लाख किसानों ने खेती छोड़ी, उनमें से 59.10 लाख (68.5 प्रतिशत) महिलायें थीं। हरियाणा में खेती छोड़ने वाले 5.37 लाख किसानों में से 87.6 प्रतिशत (4.70 लाख) महिलायें थीं। इसी तरह मध्यप्रदेश में ऐसे 11.93 लाख किसानों में से 75.5 प्रतिशत (9 लाख) महिलाएं थीं।

गुजरात में पुरुष किसानों की संख्या में 3.37 लाख की वृद्धि हुई, किन्तु महिला किसानों की संख्या में 6.92 लाख की कमी हो गयी। केवल राजस्थान एक ऐसा राज्य है, जहाँ किसानों (महिला-पुरुष दोनों में) की संख्या में 4.78 लाख की वृद्धि हुई। झारखंड एक ऐसा राज्य है जहाँ 1.14 लाख पुरुषों ने खेती छोड़ी है, किन्तु इस काम में 39 हजार महिलायें जुड़ी हैं।

### **कृषि मजदूर**

एक तरफ तो किसानों की संख्या में कमी हुई है, किन्तु दूसरी तरफ कृषि मजदूरों की संख्या में जबरदस्त बढ़ोतरी हुई है। इस आंकलन से यह पता चलता है कि खेती पर निर्भर लोगों

को खेती छोड़ने के लिए तो मजबूर कर दिया गया किन्तु उनके लिए आजीविका के कोई सम्मानजनक तैयार नहीं किये गए।

इस विषय में हम दो बातों का मुख्य रूप से उल्लेख करना चाहते हैं।

1. किसान के रूप में समाज महिलाओं से पहचान कम साझा करता है और और योगदान को नकारता, किन्तु खेतिहर मजदूर के रूप में महिलाओं को ज्यादा पहचान मिलती है। किसान समूह में 33 प्रतिशत महिलायें थीं, जबकि कृषि मजदूरों में 46.3 प्रतिशत महिलाएं थी। इसमें भी कमी आई और वर्ष 2011 में यह 42.67 प्रतिशत रह गयीं। रोजगार के साधनों के बढ़ते संकट का असर महिलाओं पर ज्यादा पड़ता है।

वर्ष 2001 में कुल कृषि मजदूरों में महिलाओं की संख्या राजस्थान में 58.2 प्रतिशत, मध्यप्रदेश में 52.5 प्रतिशत, महाराष्ट्र में 54.47 प्रतिशत, आन्ध्रप्रदेश में 53.34 प्रतिशत, तमिलनाडु में 50.7 प्रतिशत थी। दस साल बाद इसमें गिरावट देखी गयी, फिर भी राजस्थान, मध्यप्रदेश और आंध्रप्रदेश में कृषि मजदूरी का काम करने वालों में महिलाओं की संख्या 50 प्रतिशत से ज्यादा रही। हमें यह स्पष्ट रूप से नजर आता है कि किसानों की तुलना में कृषि मजदूरी में महिलाओं का योगदान ज्यादा तो है ही, वहाँ वह नजर भी आता है।

2. दस सालों की अवधि में भारत में खेतिहर मजदूरों की संख्या में 3.75 करोड़ की वृद्धि हुई है। इनमें से 32 प्रतिशत (1.21 करोड़) महिलायें हैं। उत्तरप्रदेश में 1.25 करोड़ (28.43 लाख महिलायें), आंध्रप्रदेश में 31.35 लाख (14.59 लाख महिलायें), बिहार में 49.27 लाख (10.87 लाख महिलायें), मध्यप्रदेश में 47.91 (20 लाख महिलायें) कृषि मजदूर बढे हैं।

तथ्यों में झाँकने से पता चलता है कि विकास की मौजूदा नीति न केवल कृषि क्षेत्र के लिए घातक है, बल्कि इससे पैदा होने वाले अभावों और असुरक्षा के चलते लैंगिक भेदभाव की खाई और चौड़ी होती जायेगी। गैर-बराबरी को बढ़ाना की विकास के मौजूदा दृष्टिकोण का मूल चरित्र है।

भारत में आज भी सभी महिलाओं को मातृत्व, स्वास्थ्य और सुरक्षा का अधिकार मयस्सर नहीं है। कृषि क्षेत्र में (किसान और कृषि मजदूर दोनों ही सन्दर्भों में) काम करने वाली महिलाओं के सामने एक तरह तो सूखे, बाढ़, नकली बीज-उर्वरक-कीटनाशक-फसल के मूल्य का अन्यायोचित निर्धारण सरीखे संकट हैं ही; इसके साथ ही उन्हें हिंसा, भेदभाव से मुक्ति और मातृत्व हक जैसे बुनियादी संरक्षण नहीं मिले हैं। वास्तव में हमें अपने विकास की धारा का ईमानदार आंकलन करने की जरूरत है; बेहतर होगा कि यह आंकलन लैंगिक बाल केंद्रित दृष्टिकोण से किया जाए। हम संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ की सुरक्षा परिषद में स्थायी सदस्यता चाहते हैं; किन्तु अपने किसानों की सुरक्षा तो कर नहीं पा रहे हैं! इससे आप अंदाजा लगा लें कि जिन सालों में देश की वृद्धि दर सबसे उल्लेखनीय मानी गयी, उन सालों में समाज को क्या हासिल हो रहा था?



#### SACHIN KUMAR

Sachin Kumar Jain is a development journalist, writer and director of Vikas Samvad an advocacy, capacity building and resource organisation. He has written extensively on issues of women and child rights, political economy of development etc. He has authored 54 books, manuals, primers and modules for media persons and social workers. He has also conducted/facilitated 190 training programs and capacity building sessions on issues of social concerns. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Magazine Editorial

## FEMALE COPS ON DUTY

*Greater Kashmir, October 17, 2014*



On August 10, 2000, when Dilshada Akhtar, an SPO with Jammu and Kashmir Police, was enjoying her morning tea at the Kothi Bagh Police Station, the Station House Officer, Altaf Ahmad, left hastily with his senior colleagues. A grenade had been thrown just across the road at The State Bank of India building and the officers needed to go out and monitor the situation.

“When I am back, I should have a cup of tea on my table,” the SHO told Dilshada who was still holding her cup between her hands. Dilshada was the only female cop posted at the police station. Even though she felt lonely for not having a female colleague to talk to, most of the times she enjoyed the pampering from her male staffers who gave her respect and helped with work. In the kitchen of the police station, as the terrified cook was preparing the cup of tea, Dilshada played down the incident and consoled the cook by cracking jokes and peeling vegetables for him. Suddenly there was a bang. The metal dishes fell off from the shelves, the windowpanes ruptured, and chaos took over.

A bomb planted in a white ambassador car had exploded outside the station. This was the main attack. The first grenade had been thrown only to scare away the civilians and pull together the policemen and Indian soldiers for maximum causality. Dilshada and few others, who were inside and thus saved, ran to check on the colleagues who had just left. There was blood, limbs, hands and chunks of flesh. Thirteen policemen were either dead, or dying. The SHO, who wanted his tea ready when back, was dead and barely identifiable. For Dilshada, time froze right there. Even after fourteen years, the darkness of night comes to haunt her with the blood-spattered scene. She feels breathless and her hands tingle as if touching the bare human flesh.

“I cannot forget the sensation I felt, the first time I touched the flesh pieces of my colleagues,” says Dilshada. “I feel it even now as I talk about it,” she adds, looking at her hands. Dilshada fights depression like many of her colleagues who she thinks work in the department against their will.

Poverty and family responsibilities push these poor women to work as SPO’s for ₹3,000 they get every month, “Where else can one, who has barely

finished her high school, find a job?" asks Dilshada, who is currently posted in the District Police Lines Srinagar. When Dilshada's husband left her in 1997, she needed money to raise her one-year-old son. Until then, she had always thought of herself as a pacifist who hated violence and dreaded bloodshed. But when the months of job search failed to yield any result, Dilshada took the job of SPO in police. "I thought my only association with the job was the money it gave me every month," she says.

But Dilshada was wrong. As the days became months and months years, her work began to take an emotional and mental toll on her. Her own dilemmas made her lonelier. "Sometimes when I witnessed a militant attack and required to appear in a court, I felt ashamed for standing against my own brothers whose presence never made me insecure," Dilshada sighs.

"It was painful to speak against those who paid me respect even when I was in police uniform." The SHO of the only full-fledged Women Police Station of Kashmir, Gulshan Akhtar says that the conflict has shaped the lives of Kashmiri women and that Kashmiri female cops are no exception. "Almost 95 percent of the cases we receive here are the marital disputes between couples who are just sad or depressed because of the stressful environment around them," the SHO said. On an average day, the police station receives 10-15 complaints from women. More than 80 percent of these cases are solved within the police station premises by the counseling that Gulshan and her staff provide to the couples. FIR's are seldom registered and in very rare occasions, the cases reach the courts.

However, sometimes when the counselors observe an abnormal behavior in an accuser or accused, Gulshan seeks help from NGOs who give free mental counseling to these couples. "Many times we found out that one of the partners behaved in a certain way because of a traumatic incident he/she witnessed in the past," says the SHO. Although Gulshan might be instrumental in keeping families intact, her own dreams of making a name in the profession are still unrealized. "In kashmiri society, a woman first thinks of her family, her children, in-laws and then of herself," she says.

Many times Gulshan thought of sending her nomination for an award or a program but running her house seemed more important than chasing her dreams. "Maybe someday when my children are grownups, I would give sometime to myself," she says.

Recently an inspector with the Jammu and Kashmir Police, Shakti Devi, was awarded the International Peacekeeper Award 2014, for her "exceptional" role in boosting the status of women police and helping victims of sexual

and gender violence. The Jammu based 38-year-old inspector has been serving the Jammu and Kashmir police from the past 14 years and is currently deployed in United Nations Assistance Mission Program in Afghanistan.

"No female cop from Kashmir has gone on such missions," says SSP Headquarters, Javid Hassan Bhat. "From Kashmir valley, only males go," he says. Bhat says that there are around 50 cops from Kashmir valley currently deployed under different peacekeeping programs. All of them are males. "May be women don't want to go. Or maybe it is the social set up that limits their role to homemaking," he says.

Constable Malik Mehmooda, however, believes that it is the patriarchy in the department that stands like a wall between women Kashmiri police cops and the outside world. "No one ever tells us about such avenues. They might be celebrating the award of Shakti Devi but until now we didn't even know who she was," said Mehmooda, who is also posted in the District Police Lines Srinagar.

Mehmooda recalls an incident when she discovered a bag full of ammunition hidden under a tree in Pratab Park and her male colleagues snatched the bag from her and passed it as their work.

"I cried for days, went office to office, but they all conspired against me. They felt ashamed because I was the only female cop in the group and I had achieved the breakthrough," she remembers.

Mehmooda denies any role of social setup and family obligations in stopping Kashmiri women cops from living their dreams, "I have three kids. My husband takes care of them when I am away on duty. He would be more than happy to send me anywhere. Now tell me, is it my husband or my department who prevents me from making a name?" questions Mehmooda.

Mehmooda cites the example of Shazia Akhtar, a constable who survived a grenade attack that killed her colleague, Gulshan. On September 26 2006, when a hand grenade was hurled at their Maruti Gypsy vehicle near Maharaji Bazar, the women constables, Shazia Akhtar and Gulshan Akhtar were absorbed in a discussion. The next moment, there was a bang, then silence and then a lot of blood.

Gulshan was dead. Shazia and the two male constables were critical and hospitalized. "She has metallic pins fixed and there are scars all over her body. She isn't the same cheerful woman anymore but continues to serve the department fearlessly," Mehmooda said. "Nobody acknowledges our work."

While Shakti Devi is acclaimed for boosting the status of women police, her own counterparts in Kashmir valley continue to face gender based violence, loneliness and social exclusion.

For SPO Shahzada Bano, facing her family is more dreadful than facing an angry crowd. A resident of Ram Bagh, Shahzada says her family and in-laws pick on her profession every time there is an argument at home.

“I can’t recall any incident when I was humiliated by angry stone-throwers but my mother-in-law does that all the time.”



#### **SHAZIA YOUSUF**

A freelance journalist Shazia, focusses on stories about Kashmiri women and their perspective of war through a gendered lens. She writes on issues that otherwise don't make it to the mainstream media. Her work has fetched her a number of Awards and Fellowships. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Consistent Writing On Gender Issues



# ITISHREE MANAKANKAR PRASHNA

The Prameya, February 7, 2015

କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ମହିଳାଙ୍କ ସାଙ୍ଗରେ ଯେକ୍ଷଣ ଶୋଷଣର ମାମଲା ଓଡ଼ିଶାର କିଛି କମ ନୁହେଁ, କିନ୍ତୁ ତାହା ଲୋକଲୋଚନକୁ ଅଧିପାରୁନାହିଁ। ସରକାରଙ୍କ ଉଦାସୀନତା ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ଘଟଣାରୁ ସ୍ପଷ୍ଟ ଅନୁମାନ କରାଯାଏ। କେବଳ ଜଣେ ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ନୁହେଁ, ଏପରି ହଜାର ଇତିଶ୍ରୀଙ୍କ କାହାଣୀ ହୁଏତ ଓଡ଼ିଶାରେ ରହିଛି। କିନ୍ତୁ ସେମାନେ ବାହାରକୁ ଆସିବାକୁ ଉରୁଛନ୍ତି, କାରଣ ସେମାନଙ୍କ ମନରେ ରହିଛି କିଛି ପ୍ରଶ୍ନ।

ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ(ମାନଙ୍କର ପ୍ରଶ୍ନ)  
ନିବେଦିତା ପଟ୍ଟନାୟକ  
ୟୁନିଟ-୩, ଖାରବେଳ ନଗର  
ମୋ; ୯୪୩୭୧୯୦୩୯୯

ରାୟଗଡ଼ା ଜିଲ୍ଲା ବିଚିତ୍ରି ସ୍କୁଲର ଶିକ୍ଷୟତ୍ରୀ ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ପ୍ରଧାନଙ୍କ ମୃତ୍ୟୁକୁ ଏହା ଭିତରେ ଏକବର୍ଷ ବିତିଯାଇଛି। ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଯୌନନିର୍ଯ୍ୟାତନାର ଶିକାର ହୋଇଥିଲେ। ସ୍କୁଲ ପ୍ରଧାନ ଶିକ୍ଷକଙ୍କଠାରୁ ଆରମ୍ଭ କରି ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀଙ୍କ ଦସ୍ତୁର ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ଏକ ଲମ୍ବା ରାସ୍ତା, ଯାହା ମଧ୍ୟରେ ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ଦୈନିକ ଚାଲିବାରେ ଲାଗିଥିଲା। କିନ୍ତୁ ତାଙ୍କୁ ମିଳିନଥିଲା ନ୍ୟାୟ। ଶେଷରେ ସେ ବଳି ପଡ଼ିଥିଲେ। ସରକାର ୧୦ଲକ୍ଷ ଟଙ୍କାର ଅନୁକମ୍ପାମୂଳକ ସାହାଯ୍ୟ ଯୋଷଣା କରି ନିଜର ଦାୟିତ୍ଵ ସାରି ଦେଇଥିବା ବେଳେ ଗଣମାଧ୍ୟମ, ସାଧାରଣ ଲୋକେ କିଛିଦିନ ପରେ ଭୁଲି ଯାଇଥିଲେ ଇତିଶ୍ରୀଙ୍କୁ। ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ଜଣେ ସାହାସୀ ମହିଳା। ଶେଷ ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ସେ ଲଢ଼େଇ ଜାରି ରଖୁଥିଲେ। କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଏହି ଯୌନ ଶୋଷଣ ବିପକ୍ଷରେ ଲଢ଼େଇ ତାଙ୍କୁ ମହଙ୍ଗା ପଡ଼ିଥିଲା। ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ସରକାରଙ୍କ ସମସ୍ତ ପୋରମରେ ନିଜର ଦୁଃଖ ଜଣାଇଥିଲେ। କିନ୍ତୁ ତାଙ୍କୁ ନ୍ୟାୟ ମିଳିନଥିଲା। ଅନେକ ଇତିଶ୍ରୀଙ୍କୁ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ସବୁଦିନେ ଶୋଷଣର ସମ୍ମୁଖୀନ ହେବାକୁ ପଡ଼ୁଛି। ପ୍ରତ୍ୟେକ ମହିଳା ଜାଣନ୍ତି, କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଏହା ଏକ ନିତିଦିନିଆ ଘଟଣା। ତଥାପି ଏ ସମ୍ବନ୍ଧରେ କେହି ମୁହଁ ଖୋଲନ୍ତି ନାହିଁ। ଯୌନ ଶୋଷଣ ଏକ ଅସଙ୍ଗତ ବିଷୟ। ଏହା ବିଷୟରେ ସାଧାରଣରେ ଚର୍ଚ୍ଚା ହୁଏନାହିଁ। ତେଣୁ କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଯୌନ ଶୋଷଣ ମାମଲାଗୁଡ଼ିକ ଲୋକଲୋଚନକୁ ଆସେନାହିଁ। ମହିଳାମାନେ ଏଭଳି ପରିସ୍ଥିତି ସହ ସାଲିସ କରି ନେଇଥାନ୍ତି। କାରଣ ଯଦି ଏକଥା ବାହାରକୁ ଆସିବ, ତେବେ ସେଇ ମହିଳା ଜଣକ ପ୍ରଥମେ ବଦନାମ୍ ହେବେ। ପ୍ରାୟତଃ ଦେଖାଯାଏ ଏସବୁ ମାମଲାରେ ପ୍ରକୃତ ଅପରାଧୀ ଖସିଯାଏ, ମହିଳା ଜଣକ ଦୋଷୀ ବୋଲି ପ୍ରମାଣିତ ହୋଇଯାଏ। ମହିଳା ଜଣକ ମିଛ କହୁଛନ୍ତି କିମ୍ବା ଏ ପ୍ରକାରର ପରିସ୍ଥିତି ସୃଷ୍ଟି ହେବା ପଛରେ ସେ ନିଜେ ଦାୟୀ ବୋଲି ଚର୍ଚ୍ଚା କରାଯାଏ।

ମହିଳାମାନଙ୍କ ଉପରେ ଯେତେ ପ୍ରକାର ହିଂସା ହୁଏ, ତା ମଧ୍ୟରେ କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଯୌନ ଶୋଷଣ ଏକ ଶୈଶ ବିଷୟ ବୋଲି ବିବେଚନା କରାଯାଏ। ଏହି ଘଟଣାକୁ ସେତେତା ଗୁରୁତ୍ଵ ଦିଆଯାଏ ନାହିଁ। ୨୦୧୨ ଡିସେମ୍ବରରେ ଦିଲ୍ଲୀରେ ଘଟିଥିବା ଜୟଧର୍ମଚମ ଗଣଧର୍ଷଣରେ ଦେଶବ୍ୟାପୀ ଯେପରି ଜନସଚେତନତା ସୃଷ୍ଟି ହୋଇଥିଲା ସେପରି ଆଜି ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ଅନ୍ୟ କୌଣସି ମହିଳା ହିଂସା ବିରୋଧରେ ହୋଇନାହିଁ। କେବଳ ବଳକୁରା ହିଁ ମହିଳାଙ୍କ ବିରୋଧରେ ସର୍ବବୃହତ ହିଂସା ଏବଂ ଏହାଦ୍ଵାରା ମହିଳାଟିର ଷଡ଼ି ହୁଏ ବୋଲି ସାଧାରଣ ଲୋକଙ୍କର ଧାରଣା। ଅପର ପକ୍ଷରେ ଦେଖିଲେ କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଯୌନ ଶୋଷଣ ଦ୍ଵାରା ମହିଳାଟି ଅନେକ କିଛି ହରାଏ। ନିଜର ଆତ୍ମସମ୍ମାନ, ଶାନ୍ତି, ମାନସିକ ସନ୍ତୁଳନ, ଏମିତିକି ବେଳେବେଳେ ତାଙ୍କୁ ଚାକିରି ହରାଇବାକୁ ପଡ଼େ। ଆମ ଦେଶରେ କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ମହିଳାମାନେ ସମ୍ମୁଖୀନ ହେଉଥିବାର ବିଭିନ୍ନ ପ୍ରକାର ଯୌନ ନିର୍ଯ୍ୟାତନାର ପ୍ରତିକାର ପାଇଁ କୌଣସି ବିଧି-ବିଧି ଆଇନ ନଥିଲା। ରାଜସ୍ଥାନରେ ସମାଜକର୍ମୀ ଉର୍ଦ୍ଦିରା ଦେବୀ ଏକ ବାଲ୍ୟ ବିବାହ ପ୍ରତିରୋଧ କରିବାକୁ ଚେଷ୍ଟା କରି ଗଣଧର୍ଷଣର ଶିକାର ହେବା ପରେ ବିଶାଖା ନାମକ ମହିଳା ଅଧିକାର ସଂଗଠନ ଓ ଅନ୍ୟ କେତେକ ଏଭଳି ସଂଗଠନ ସୁପ୍ରିମକୋର୍ଟରେ ରାଜସ୍ଥାନ ସରକାର ବିରୋଧରେ ଏକ ଜନସ୍ଵାର୍ଥ ମାମଲା ଆରମ୍ଭ କରିବାରୁ ୧୯୯୭ରେ ସୁପ୍ରିମକୋର୍ଟ ବିଶାଖା ନିର୍ଦ୍ଦେଶାବଳୀ ଜାରି କରିଥିଲେ। କାର୍ଯ୍ୟାଳୟରେ ମହିଳାମାନଙ୍କର ମୌଳିକ ଅଧିକାର କିଭଳି ସୁରକ୍ଷିତ ରହିବ, ସେ ସମ୍ବନ୍ଧରେ ଏକ ସ୍ପଷ୍ଟ ନିର୍ଦ୍ଦେଶାବଳୀ ଉଲ୍ଲେଖ କରିଥିଲେ, କିନ୍ତୁ କେହି ସରକାର ଏହାକୁ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକାରୀ କରିନଥିଲେ। ଏହା ଭିତରେ ୧୬ ବର୍ଷ ବିତି ଯାଇଅଛି। ସରକାର ସତେ ଯେମିତି ୧୬ବର୍ଷ ଧରି ଅପେକ୍ଷା କରିଥିଲେ କିଏ ଜଣେ ବଳି ପଡ଼ିବାରୁ। ନିର୍ଭୀକ୍ଷା ଗଣବଳକୁଳର ପରେ ସରକାରଙ୍କ ନିଦ ଭାଙ୍ଗିଲା ଏବଂ ୨୦୧୩ ଫେବୃଆରୀରେ ବିଶାଖା ନିର୍ଦ୍ଦେଶାବଳୀକୁ ଆଇନରେ ପରିଣତ କରିବା ପାଇଁ ସରକାର ବିଲ ଆଣିଲେ ଯାହାର ନାମ ହେଉଛି କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ମହିଳାଙ୍କ ଉପରେ ନିର୍ଯ୍ୟାତନା( ସୁରକ୍ଷା, ନିଷେଧ ଓ ନିରାକରଣ) ଆଇନ

୨୦୧୩। ଏହି ଆଇନରେ କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ସୈନିକ ନିର୍ଯ୍ୟାତନା ଯୋଗୁଁ ମହିଳାମାନଙ୍କ ସମ୍ବନ୍ଧୀୟ ପ୍ରସଙ୍ଗ ଗୈରିକି ଅଧିକାରଗୁଡ଼ିକ ଯଥା ସମାନତା ଅଧିକାର, ମର୍ଯ୍ୟାଦାପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣ ଜୀବନ ବହୁତା ଅଧିକାର ତଥା ନିରାପତ୍ତ କର୍ମସ୍ଥଳୀ ଅଧିକାର ବୋଲି ସ୍ୱୀକୃତି ଦିଆଯାଇଅଛି । ଏହା ସହିତ ଏହି ଆଇନରେ କର୍ମସ୍ଥଳୀରେ ମହିଳାମାନଙ୍କର ସୈନିକ ନିର୍ଯ୍ୟାତନାକୁ ସୁରକ୍ଷା ଦେବାର ବିଭିନ୍ନ ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥା ରହିଛି ।

କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ର କାହାକୁ କହିବା-୧) ସମସ୍ତ ସରକାରୀ ଓ ବେସରକାରୀ ଅନୁଷ୍ଠାନ, ରାଷ୍ଟ୍ରୀୟତ ଉଦ୍ୟୋଗ ୨) ତାତ୍ତ୍ୱଗଣନା କିମ୍ବା ନର୍ସିଂହୋମ ୩) ଶିକ୍ଷାନୁଷ୍ଠାନ, ୪) ଅଣ ସଂଗଠିତ କ୍ଷେତ୍ର, ୫) କ୍ରୀଡା ଅନୁଷ୍ଠାନ, ଷ୍ଟାଡ଼ିୟମରେ ଥିବା ହସ୍ତେଇ, ଆବାସିକ ତାଲିମ କେନ୍ଦ୍ର ଓ ଅଣ ଆବାସିକ ତାଲିମକେନ୍ଦ୍ର ମଧ୍ୟ ଏଥି ମଧ୍ୟରେ ଅନ୍ତର୍ଭୁକ୍ତ ।

କଣ କହେ ଏହି - ଆଇନ ଅନୁସାରେ ପ୍ରତ୍ୟେକ ସରକାରୀ ଓ ବେସରକାରୀ ଅନୁଷ୍ଠାନ, ଅଣ ସଂଗଠିତ କ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ମହିଳାଙ୍କ ଉପରେ ହେଉଥିବା ନିର୍ଯ୍ୟାତନାକୁ ରୋକିବା ପାଇଁ ଇଣ୍ଟରନାଲ କମ୍ପ୍ଲେନସ୍ କମିଟି( ଆଭ୍ୟନ୍ତରୀଣ ଅଭିଯୋଗ କମିଟି) ଗଠନ କରିବା ବାଧ୍ୟତାମୂଳକ ଅଟେ । ବର୍ତ୍ତମାନ ପ୍ରଶ୍ନ ଉପରେ ଯେ ଆଇନ ତିଆରି ହେବାପରେ କେତେ ସରକାରୀ, ବେସରକାରୀ ଅଫିସରେ ଏହା କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକାରୀ ହୋଇଛି ? ଇଣ୍ଟରନାଲ କମ୍ପ୍ଲେନସ୍ କମିଟି ଗଠିତ ହୋଇଛି ? ଏଠାରେ ଉଲ୍ଲେଖ ଯୋଗ୍ୟ ଯେ, ତେହେଲକାର ପୂର୍ବତନ ମୁଖ୍ୟ ସମ୍ପାଦକ ତରୁଣ ତେଜପାଲ ତାଙ୍କର ଜଣେ ଅଧିକାରୀ ମହିଳା କର୍ମଚାରୀଙ୍କୁ ସୈନିକ ଉପାଦାନ କରିବା ଅଭିଯୋଗ ହେବା ପରେ ଜଣାପଡ଼ିଲା ଯେ ତେହେଲକା କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମରେ ବିଶାଖା ନିର୍ଦ୍ଦେଶାବଳୀର ଉଲ୍ଲଙ୍ଘନ କରାଯାଇ କୈାସି ଅଭିଯୋଗ କମିଟି ପ୍ରତିଷ୍ଠା କରାଯାଇନାହିଁ । ତେବେ କର୍ମଚାରୀ ମହିଳାମାନଙ୍କ ପ୍ରତି ଏଭଳି ହେୟଜ୍ଞାନ କେବଳ ତେହେଲକା ଭଳି ଏକ ଘରୋଇ ବ୍ୟବସାୟ କ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ସୀମିତ ନୁହେଁ । ଖୋଦ୍ ଭାରତ ସରକାର ତଥା ଅନେକ ରାଜ୍ୟ ସରକାରଙ୍କ ଆଚରଣ ମଧ୍ୟ ଏହାଠାରୁ ଅଧିକ ଅକ୍ଷମଣୀୟ ।

ଓଡ଼ିଶାରେ ଆଇନର ସ୍ଥିତି-ଓଡ଼ିଶାରେ ମହିଳା ଶିଶୁକଲ୍ୟାଣ ବିଭାଗ ପକ୍ଷରୁ ଯଦିଓ ଆଇନ ସମ୍ବନ୍ଧରେ ବିଜ୍ଞପ୍ତି ପ୍ରକାଶ ପାଇଛି, ତଥାପି ବେସରକାରୀ ସ୍ତରରେ କେବଳ ନୁହେଁ, ସରକାରୀ ସ୍ତରରେ ବି ଆଭ୍ୟନ୍ତରୀଣ କମିଟି ପ୍ରାୟ ଗଠନ କରାଯାଇନାହିଁ । କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ମହିଳାଙ୍କ ସାଙ୍ଗରେ ସୈନିକ ଶୋଷଣର ମାମଲା ଓଡ଼ିଶାରେ କିଛି କମ ନୁହେଁ, କିନ୍ତୁ ତାହା ଲୋକଲୋଚନକୁ ଆସିପାରୁନାହିଁ । ସରକାରଙ୍କ ଉଦାସୀନତା ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ଘଟଣାରୁ ସ୍ପଷ୍ଟ ଅନୁମାନ କରାଯାଏ । କେବଳ ଜଣେ ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ ନୁହେଁ, ଏପରି ହଜାର ହଜାର ଇତିଶ୍ରୀଙ୍କ କାହାଣୀ ସୁଏତ ଓଡ଼ିଶାରେ ରହିଛି । କିନ୍ତୁ ସେମାନେ ବାହାରକୁ ଆସିବାକୁ ଉଚ୍ଚଛାଡ଼ି, କାରଣ ସେମାନଙ୍କ ମନରେ ରହିଛି କିଛି ପ୍ରଶ୍ନ-ଯଦି କର୍ମକ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଦିଆଯାଇଥିବା ସୈନିକ ଶୋଷଣ ବିରୋଧରେ ସେମାନେ ପାରି ଖୋଲିବେ ତେବେ ତାଙ୍କ ପ୍ରତି ଏ ପ୍ରକାର ଆଚରଣ କରିଥିବା ବ୍ୟକ୍ତିତା ଦଣ୍ଡ ପାଇବ କି, ଯାହା ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ କ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ଘଟିନାହିଁ ? ଯଦି ତାଙ୍କ ଭିତରୁ କାହାର ମୃତ୍ୟୁ ହେଲା, ପୋଷ୍ଟମୋର୍ଟମ ରିପୋର୍ଟରେ ଠିକ୍ ତଥ୍ୟ ପ୍ରକାଶ ପାଇବ କି ? ମୃତ୍ୟୁ ପାଇଁ ଦାୟୀ ପଦାଧିକାରୀମାନଙ୍କ ବିରୋଧରେ ଚାର୍ଜସିଟ୍ ପ୍ରସ୍ତୁତ ହେବ କି ? ଯାହାକି ଇତିଶ୍ରୀ କ୍ଷେତ୍ରରେ ହୋଇନାହିଁ । ଏସବୁ ପ୍ରଶ୍ନର ଉତ୍ତର ସୁଏତ ଆମ କାହା ପାଖରେ ନାହିଁ । ତେଣୁ ଏଥିରେ ସ୍ପଷ୍ଟ ହେଉଛି ଯେ ମହିଳାଙ୍କୁ ନ୍ୟାୟ ପ୍ରଦାନ କରିବାରେ ରାଜ୍ୟ ସରକାରୀ ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥା ବିଫଳ ହୋଇଛି ।



**NIBEDITA PATTANAİK**  
 With fifteen years of experience in media Nibedita is currently a media advocate of CDAC, Hyderabad and UNICEF Odisha. Her writing focusses on gender issues with a focus on discrimination faced by a girl child. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Column

## GARBHVATI KARAMCHARIYON SE KYUN HOTA HAI BHEDBHAAV?

*Broadcast in BBC Radio Hindi, March 20, 2015*

**B**arely a month after she informed her bosses in India that she was pregnant with her first child, a woman journalist got the shock of her life. In her inbox was a curt termination letter from her employer, a leading news channel. Her performance, it said, had been "unsatisfactory".

She hit back and sued her employer. She told the court that the "termination was illegal and flouted labour laws" by denying her the protection and benefits extended to pregnant women workers. Three years later, the court instructed the channel to give her job back with back wages. The channel has appealed against the ruling.

India's maternity laws allow working women three months of paid leave and job protection. But the reality can often be different: India's labour courts received more than 900 complaints of denial of maternity benefits by employers between 2008 and 2012. But most working women, when denied maternity benefits, do not go to court, they just stop working.

Mothers traditionally bring up children in India. Few employers provide flexible working hours or crèche facilities, and many do not prefer to hire women who are mothers.

According to a 2013 World Bank study, only 27% of the female population aged over 15 is working in India. This is the lowest rate of women's participation in any workforce among the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries, with the highest in China at 64%.

This feature highlights the silent discrimination that forces many working mothers to quit their jobs after having children.



### DIVYA ARYA

Divya Arya is an award winning correspondent with the BBC based in India. Her focus is on exploring human rights issues with a specific focus on gender. Her research paper 'Headlining Sexual Violence' is due to be published soon. She has also critically evaluated media reporting of sexual violence after the 2012 Delhi gangrape. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16-Best Radio News Feature

# Women and Politics

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On paper India's has 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, the moot question is how far has this constitutional provision empowered the women to play a defining role in the development process. Twenty five years after the 73rd amendment, it is a fact that women continue to remain in the shadows with men exercising power by proxy.

Sarika Malhotra reports from the remote villages of Vaishali and Muzaffarpur in Bihar highlighting the poor participation of women in local self government institutions. Even when a village has a woman mukhiya, real power remains with her husband, called the mukhiyapati and his authority is accepted and justified by the people. The tokenism and appeasement policies of government are denying women the real opportunities for political empowerment, Sarika avers.

The recent amendment to the Panchayati Raj Act by Haryana and Rajasthan governments that set minimum educational qualifications for contesting the panchayat elections is yet another measure which has more devastating impact on women, who are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to schooling and education. Shreya Ila Anusuya, talks about successful woman leaders at Panchayat level who were instrumental in bringing about social change in the villages and how the new rule has disempowered them.

Makepeace Sithlou presents an interesting insight into how women caught in the cross currents of the political system and people's protests play an important role in dousing the passions and bringing in normalcy, yet are left out of the decision making roles in strategising the response to the Government. Makepeace writes about the tribal protests in Churachandpur district of Manipur regarding violence by the police forces on local activists protesting three bills that were passed without the consent of the locals. Women responded to the violent protests by organizing silent and peaceful marches which helped decelerate the tensions, yet, the Manipuri women were nowhere in the leadership roles to decide the future course of action against the bills.

Going through the articles one cannot but realize that inspite of the constitutional provisions and demonstration of exemplary leadership at grassroot level by women, the political power is majorly vested in men who are in no hurry to part with it.

## ALL THE QUEEN'S MEN

*Business Today, August 31, 2014*

**A** couple of men, seated on wooden chairs, wait outside a room in a nondescript one-storied building with a freshly plastered name plate: 'Office of Mahmuda Khatoon, Mukhiya, Vaishali Panchayat'. Soon, they are greeted by a short-statured man in his 40s dressed in a sparkling white starched kurta pyjama and white canvas shoes. He listens to the concerns of the villagers about the Mukhya Mantri Kanya Vivah Yojna - it provides financial assistance to the family of the girl child at the time of her marriage - and is addressed as Mukhiyaji (chief). The man assures the group that he has verified their marriage certificate and the papers are being processed at the block office. The group is at ease interacting with Mukhiyaji. In fact, this is their seventh meeting with him for the same purpose. With much pride, the man introduces himself as M.D. Kalamuddin, 'President of Vaishali, MP'.

MP stands for Mukhiya Pati, the official name for the husbands of women mukhiyas, explains Kalamuddin. "Sab kuch toh madam hain, hum to bas unke PA hain (Madam has all the powers, I'm just her PA)," he quips. Kalamuddin's wife, Khatoon, not seen in or around the premises, is the mukhiya of Vaishali panchyat, and Kalamuddin performs duties on her behalf. In effect, mukhiya of Vaishali panchayat in north Bihar. When enquired about Khatoon, Kalamuddin says she is resting in the house, which is located right opposite the office. "Humara kaam to subah 5 se raat ke 9 baje tak chalta hai, sab cheez ke liye unko disturb nahi kar saktey. Kuch zaroori hota hai to jaake sign karwa lete hain." (Our work goes on from five in the morning to nine in the night. We don't disturb her for everything. If it is important, we go and get her signature). After much insistence, Kalam Saheb agrees to call Khatoon and she finally emerges from the house. It was one of those rare occasions when the villagers got to see their mukhiya.



This is not an isolated case in Bihar. As Business Today travelled through Vaishali district, such examples stood out. The house of Salempur panchayat's Mukhiya Neelam Devi has a similar setting. Rounds of tea have been served in the verandah where a group of men wait to meet the mukhiya. Villagers explain that a lady can't meet visitors unless accompanied by the men of the house. After some 50 minutes, a bike stops in front of the house and its driver is greeted by the group as Mukhiyaji.

A while later, Devi emerges from the house and explains the reason for her delay in meeting us. "Hum issleye bahar nahi aa rahe they kyonki sab kaam toh yehee kartey hain, toh sab jaankaari inko hai." (I was not coming out because my husband does all the work and has all the information). Devi's husband, Ram Krishna Singh, a rural medical practitioner, says his entire day goes in addressing the issues of villagers who flock to their house from morning till midnight. "Itney log aate hain ki madam ka poora din chai bananey mein nikal jaata hai. Ghar ke kaam aur bacchon ke liye bhee samay mushkil se milta hai," he says. (There are so many visitors that madam's entire day goes in making tea for them. She gets little time for household chores and children.)

Some 100 cups of tea are served daily to visitors in their house as the panchayat bhawan is undergoing renovation and madam has to ensure that all people coming to meet them are looked after well, adds Singh. "Madam authority hain, hum to kewal formality nibhatey hain, "(Madam is the authority, I just take orders) he asserts. However, Devi confirms that she has attended only a couple of meetings with the Block Development Officer (BDO), District Magistrate and District Development Commissioner since becoming the Mukhiya in 2011.

### **RUBBER STAMPS**

Devi and Khaton are among the scores of women mukhiyas, sarpanchs and pramukhs in the state who find themselves in a peculiar situation. They were elected after 50 per cent mukhiya and sarpanch seats (some 4,200) in panchayats were reserved for women in Bihar in 2006. But most of these women are just rubber stamps with the men in their house - it can be the husband, father or the son - running the show. A random sample of Vaishali block's women mukhiyas and pramukhs makes this evident. In Bhagwatpur panchayat, Paspati Devi is the Mukhiya but her son Nunu Singh is known to discharge all official duties. Usha Devi served as the Pramukh of Vaishali for seven years till June this year but her husband Nawal Rai, known as Pramukh Pati, did all the official work. Villagers point out that Usha Devi was hardly ever seen at the block office during her entire tenure.

Not just the villagers, but the block officials also are accustomed to interacting with the male members. In the block office of Vaishali, the official contact list of newly elected sarpanchs and mukhiyas, sourced by BT, has a column for the name of the husband, father and son. Interestingly, the contact numbers mentioned in the list are of the male members instead of the lady mukhiya. Indeed, most BDOs don't even recognise the real mukhiyas, says Anil Kumar Bhagat, a resident of Vaishali district. "In a group of women, the BDO will not be able to recognise the mukhiya. All officials are used to interacting with the Mukhiya and the Pramukh Patis," he says.

The Bihar government is aware of the ground realities in the state. In the past, women mukhiyas have been discouraged from being accompanied by their husbands, or representing them, for official meetings. Shashi Shekhar Sharma, Principal Secretary, Panchayati Raj Department, Bihar, acknowledges the problem but points out that it is not limited to the state alone. "In Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh men accompany and assist women mukhiyas. However, one has to look at the situation rationally. It's a structural problem. The root cause for this is illiteracy, lack of confidence and training of these women representatives," he says.

Sharma explains that the role of the panchayats has evolved in the recent past, with considerable development and financial decisions resting in the hands of the mukhiyas - right from implementing development and welfare schemes such as MGNREGA and Indira Awaas Yojna to construction of roads and drainages. These involve preparing audit reports and giving sanctions for projects. "Since the seats are reserved, women get elected. And from the very next day they are supposed to perform their duties and implement schemes and give sanctions for projects," says Sharma. "However, since most women are illiterate and do not have any training of handling technical issues and financial deals, they have no option but to take assistance from male family members. Also, family members are the only people she can trust for financial decisions."

The government is conscious of this problem and is making provisions to train and assist these women representatives. "This is just a transitional phase. Once these representatives are trained, they will feel confident and will be empowered," says Sharma.

However, that promises to be a tall order. The disconnect of the women representatives is not limited to the administrative set-up. Villagers point out that in most cases these women representatives do not even come out of the house to campaign during panchayat elections to protect the pratishta (prestige) of the family, "Where is the question of going out for campaigning



M.D. Kalamuddin, Husband of Mahmuda Khatoon, Mukhiya (Chief), Vaishali gram panchayat.  
(Photos by Sarika Malhotra)

when women are still accompanied by male members while going out of the house? The lady's role is limited to dutifully filing her nomination papers and casting her vote," says Pramod Kumar Singh, a resident of the district.

Singh says women mukhiyas do not even know where the papers are filed and what documents are required. "She just signs on the nomination form brought to her. All political negotiations, decisions, bargains and approach are decided by the men." Indeed, the social set-up is such that women hardly get any time to get involved in public life. "All the household chores are undertaken by the lady and since most homes have big joint families there is no time for other activities. Middle-class women stay in purdah," says Singh.

Clearly, it will be a while before reservation of panchayat seats lead to real empowerment for these women. "Where is the question of empowerment? She has instead empowered her husband or son," says Bhagat. Villagers believe that in this milieu, it will take another couple of decades for women to contest elections independently and not as a proxy for the family.

Bhagat explains the dynamics. "Every panchayat has a similar socio economic set-up in which a few families or individuals have political inclination and ambition. They are the ones who contest elections and spend money on elections," he says. "Depending on the category of reservation, they field their candidates, who can either be from their family or outside. If it's a reserved



seat for women, they field their mothers or wives. The lady is just used as a pawn to fulfil the ambition of the family or individual."

This is also evident from the case of Kalamuddin, who had lost the election to the Bihar legislative assembly (Vidhan Sabha) on a BSP ticket in 2010 from Kurhani, in Muzaffarpur district. He then fielded his wife, Khatoon, in 2011 from Vaishali in mukhiya elections, since the seat was reserved for women. Devi's case is no different. Her family is quite influential and she was fielded for the post of sarpanch in the previous panchayat election from Salempur, a reserved seat. Devi had won, as the seat was reserved. Now she is the mukhiya. Interestingly, in Devi's case, the name and mobile number of her husband's uncle - Mohanji - is also mentioned in the official contact list at the block office.

### A LOT AT STAKE

Power is increasingly being vested with panchayats for implementation of crucial schemes and projects. Indeed, becoming a mukhiya brings in recognition and power, besides being a stepping stone for a bigger role in public life. Development economist Bina Agarwal believes that both, the lure of financial resources and the political power and status which goes with the position of mukhiya, is a big draw. This makes elections to the panchayats a high-stakes battle. For instance, a mukhiya has to implement and administer 29 schemes. A panchayat gets ₹50 to ₹60 lakh to spend on different central and state schemes in a year, in addition to being responsible for the appointment of panchayat school teachers, Asha Health Workers and Anganwadi (government-sponsored child- and mother-care centre) workers.

"Everything in the panchayat gets routed through the mukhiya and other officials including the BDO and panchayat secretary become natural allies, with each in the chain getting a stipulated cut for every work done, be it construction, distribution, verification or appointments," says Krishna Kumar, a social worker associated with Prayog, an NGO which works in rural areas.



Neelam Devi, Mukhiya (Chief) of Salempur gram panchayat and husband Ram Krishna Singh.

In reserved panchayat seats for women, the husband or the head of the family decides and dictates the terms on which implementation of any project or scheme takes place. Kumar points out that the mukhiyas get a meagre allowance of ₹1,200 a month and that is not the only driving force for women or their husbands to be in public life which involves working round the clock. "Since the real elected representatives do not perform any duty and all dealings are done by the husbands or sons, corruption has escalated," says Kumar. "As the block officials oblige the family members by interacting with them, therefore taking bigger cuts from the family members, it eventually translates into greater corruption in schemes."

Clearly, most women representatives have stayed at home and functioned as mere figureheads. "In many cases these women have very little or no knowledge about local governance issues. They simply put their sign or thumb impression on the dotted line," says Ranjana Kumari, Director of the Delhi-based Centre for Social Research. Bihar, and indeed India, is not unfamiliar with women running the show on behalf of their husbands. "Bihar was ruled by Rabri Devi for eight years from 1997 after her husband (Lalu Prasad Yadav) resigned following the fodder scam charges but administered the state," says Kumari.

But rampant corruption in welfare schemes has often put these women representatives in a strange position. In cases of corruption, FIRs and complaints are lodged against these women since they are the official authorised signatories but the real culprits are mostly the men. Such examples are growing in Bihar, says Minni Thakur, Reader and Head of the Department of Political Science, RNAR College, Samastipur, Bihar and author of "Women Empowerment Through Panchayati Raj Institutions". "Complaints are lodged against them and action is taken against these women representatives as they are the authorised signatory. In cases of inquiry they have no clue of what has happened and how to deal with the situation. They just follow the advice of their husbands."

Observers feel, contrary to expectations, reservation is diluting the concept of Gram Swaraj (self rule by the villages). "In the gram sabha (meeting of villagers), the mukhiya proposes all projects in front of the villagers where the plans, schemes, allocations are discussed, passed and then taken to the block officers for approval," says Kumar.

He adds that, since the lady mukhiya does not attend the meeting, the plans are internally decided by the husbands, sons, their coterie and officials, and the lady only signs the documents. "The common man is completely kept out and is unaware of the development plans, as the sabha seldom takes place.

In essence, it has weakened grassroot democracy. The only time the lady mukhiya is seen publicly is on August 15 and October 2 when it is mandatory and makes for a photo opportunity for the block records," says Kumar.

So are reservations bringing about any change in the socioeconomic status of women? It takes generations to bring about social changes, says activist Shabnam Hashmi. "A large proportion of women are still surviving under khaps and in feudal societies which treat them as the property of men. The rise of communal politics and caste politics has further made the women second-class citizens," says Hashmi.

The conservative social set-up is making it difficult for women's reservation to work, say observers. "Patriarchy and illiteracy contribute to us becoming a static society in most parts of the country. Therefore, women are controlled by their fathers, brothers and then husbands. The government's schemes for empowering women are good but their implementation is pathetic," says George Mathew, Chairman, Institute of Social Sciences, Delhi.

Under then chief minister Nitish Kumar, Bihar was the first state in the country to introduce 50 per cent reservation for women in all tiers of panchayats through the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006. Currently eight states, including Bihar, have reserved half the seats in local self government bodies for women

"After the introduction of reservation, Bihar witnessed almost 10 per cent increase in voting in the 2009 parliamentary elections on account of women voters. It worked to the government's advantage. It translated into sure shot vote bank," says Thakur. While things really did not improve for the women on the ground, for the first time they got some recognition socially. "It worked as appeasement politics. The very fact that the men of the house are getting papers signed from her, she is getting some importance in the social space, is addressed as madamji and children in schools flaunt that their mother is the mukhiya, was significant," adds Thakur.

But whether reservation has actually empowered women at the grassroots is debatable.



#### **SARIKA MALHOTRA**

Sarika Malhotra is Senior Assistant Editor at Hindustan Times. A Doctorate from JNU, she reports on development economics and ground reportage is her calling. She has a diverse experience of reporting on private equity, financial services, grassroots entrepreneurship, water and social economy and has been conferred a number of awards. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Investigative Story

## IN A DEMOCRACY, EDUCATION CERTICATES SHOULDN'T MATTER. SO WHY IS NO ONE TALKING ABOUT NORTI BAI?

*The Wire, May 14, 2016*

*The ght to make the right to contest elections a fundamental right is on, but in the meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of poor, Dalit and Adivasi people, religious minorities and women in two states are waiting in limbo*

**B**y any account, Norti Bai is a trailblazer. As a construction worker in 1981, she won a legal fight on the chronic gender pay gap between men and women workers. Thereafter, she became computer literate, even though she'd had to drop out of school as a child.

She contested panchayat elections, becoming the first Dalit woman sarpanch in the village of Harmara in Rajasthan. As sarpanch, Norti Bai organised computer training lessons for the girls in the village, fought land mafia to build a hospital and had three thousand trees planted by villagers who she ensured were employed under the MNREGA scheme.

As a highly capable and effective sarpanch, who fearlessly stood up to powerful upper caste men in the village, built latrines and roads, hand-pumps and solar streetlights, she exemplified the spirit of the 73rd amendment, the central aim of which was to decentralise government in India.

Norti Bai should have been celebrated as a shining example of the success of the panchayati raj system, and a strong example of the power of those



battling the horrors of gender, caste, and class discrimination in India.

Instead, right before the elections that Norti Bai would have re- contested were due to be announced in 2014, an ordinance was issued that disqualified her from running for sarpanch again.

Speaking at a panel discussion organised by the National Law University, Delhi and Dialogue for Democracy in New Delhi last week, Norty Bai said: "I got my rights for five years, and then they got taken away. In those five years, many women had started asking questions of the establishment. They have been let down. If we can manage the home, we can absolutely take part in the political process."

### **Why was Norty Bai disqualified?**

The Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, said that any candidates had to meet the following requirements in order to be eligible for contesting Panchayat elections:

They had to have 'a functional sanitary toilet in the house.' They had to have cleared Class X to become a member of a Zila Parishad or Panchayat Samiti. To run for sarpanch, they should have cleared Class V if contesting in a scheduled area, and Class VIII if in a non-scheduled area.

These amendments were passed by the Rajasthan state legislature on March 28, 2015, effectively amending the Rajasthan Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. They had an immediate and devastating impact on the political participation of poor people, Dalit-bahujan and Adivasi people, women and religious minorities in the state.

A full 75% of the rural population over the age of 20 became ineligible to contest sarpanch elections, and a much higher number was automatically disqualified from contesting block and district panchayat polls. A vast majority of women belonging to the Scheduled Castes – 93% – became disqualified.

Rajasthan is not the only state to have taken this step. Haryana too passed these amendments, first as an ordinance, and then as an Act. In Haryana, a general candidate must have passed class X to contest panchayat elections, while SC and women candidates need to have passed Class VIII in order to qualify. Any SC woman who wishes to contest the post of 'panch' must have completed Class V.

The Haryana amendments also include the clause for 'a functional toilet', and add property-based disqualifications such as failure to pay arrears to any agriculture co-operative society or banks, or even the failure to pay electricity bill dues.

Speaking about the consequences of the amendments on the political participation of women in Haryana, general secretary of the All India



Women attending the special Gram Sabha. Kabza Gram Panchayat, District Dungarpur, Rajasthan.  
Credit: UN Women/Gaganjit Singh, Flickr CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Democratic Women's Associate Jagmati Sangwan said, "After the 73rd amendment, women were beginning to enter the mainstream of political life with the panchayat elections. There were debates about what they would do: would they go to meetings, would they go out to campaign, etc. Women were moving ahead with a lot of enthusiasm. But as soon as these amendments came into force, the dreams of lakhs of women who wanted to serve their communities and their panchayats were shattered."

Preet Singh, a former sarpanch from Haryana who has also been disqualified from contesting, said, "I am speaking about my work from experience, not formal education. We may not be educated, but we know what we are doing. We can educate people with degrees about the issues affecting rural Haryana. A person with a PhD will not have the same knowledge. And people who can afford to are producing false certificates in order to qualify, whereas our honest and honourable work is being dismissed."

### **Impact of the amendments**

As a result of these amendments, both states have seen a large number of seats go uncontested or be won unopposed because only one candidate turned out to be eligible under the new criteria. Many seats lie vacant because nobody who qualifies can be found. In Rajasthan, 260 sarpanches were elected unopposed in the 2015 panchayat elections, while more than half of Haryana's panchs were elected unopposed.

The criteria have had a detrimental effect on villages that languish without a sarpanch, and have wreaked havoc on potential benefits that affirmative

action once provided. For example, 13 panchayats in Rajasthan went unopposed, of which 12 were reserved for SC/ST and women.

“Research shows that the connection between formal education and the panchayat system doesn’t exist. There is no connection between how much you have studied, and your ability to empathise with people and meet their needs,” said Mani Shankar Aiyar, former Minister for Panchayati Raj.

Neera Chandhoke, professor of political science at Delhi University said, “To bar people and not recognise their political competency just because of formal education seems to me a violation of democracy.”

Chandhoke added, “Whose fault is it that people have not been educated? These amendments are punishing people for being disadvantaged. The kind of formal education we do have needs to be questioned, since the public university is in serious crisis. At the local level, people speaking back to power is a kind of education that is equally needed in India.”

Speaking of the clause to have a functional toilet, Bezwada Wilson, convenor of the Safai Karmachari Andolan said, “Can anyone make their own toilet functional? You can’t, but you are eligible because you have one. But the poor Dalit or Adivasi women workers who make your toilets functional are uneducated? Your problem is not toilets or education, it’s the fact that you don’t want to see this section of society within the political system at all.”

### **The Supreme Court judgement**

The amendments were challenged at the Supreme Court, and a two-judge bench upheld the constitutional validity of the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Act, in a judgement that has since been heavily criticised (<http://thewire.in/2015/12/10/time-for-indias-poor-to-say-farewell-to-universal-adult-franchise-17078/>) for its conflation of the uneducated with the corrupt, the criminal and the inept. The Court ruled that (<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/supreme-court-upholds-minimum-educational-criteria-for-contesting-polls-in-haryana/>) “it is only education which gives a human being the power to discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad.” It dismissed the exclusionary impact of the amendments, and declared that if people did not have functional toilet in the house, it was not due to poverty but “because of their lacking the requisite will.” The judges also claimed that they were not sure whether “deeply indebted” people would be “genuinely interested in contesting elections.”

Both Nortri Bai and Preet Singh expressed their objections to the judgement, taking a strong stance against what they assert is a criminalisation of poor

people. "We had hoped the Supreme Court would hear our concerns, but our hopes were dashed," said Singh.

Writing about the judgment (<http://thewire.in/2015/12/11/the-supreme-courts-judgement-is-frightening-in-its-implications-17131/>), senior lawyer Indira Jaising, who argued the case on behalf of interveners from Rajasthan, said: "Universal adult franchise, which carries with it the right to contest an election, is so fundamental to the very concept of republicanism and democracy the world over that no genuinely democratic country has imposed the requirement of formal education as a pre-condition to contest an election. Nor is there any such disqualification from contesting an election for MPs and MLAs in India."

Speaking at the panel discussion, Jaising added, "What is painful about this judgment is that it is naked in its elitism. There is no attempt to disguise it. It is time for civil society to protest and say that certain Supreme Court judgements are just not acceptable." Pointing out that the link between education and corruption is arbitrary, Jaising said, "This is the same court which has sent A. Raja to prison in connection with the 2G scam, and he has a law degree."

Independent law researcher Dr. Usha Ramanathan said, "The idea of treating people in poverty as criminal is reflected in the fact that corruption is being used as a justification to keep them out. It is completely absurd to attribute corruption to poverty when the Vijay Mallyas of the world are getting away with defaulting on crores of rupees. What is more, there is no disqualification for people who build dry toilets in their houses, which means that the practice of untouchability is not being punished."

Ramanathan added that the educational qualifications too are arbitrary and do not necessarily qualify one to become a panchayat leader. "It's a shame how little we seem to know about the people we're making decisions about. This is totally non-representative," she said. "It is clearly a move to recapture spaces of power by the country's elites."

### **In limbo**

In March this year, the Opposition pushed through an amendment to the President's address, which sought to force the Central Government to secure "the fundamental right of all citizens to contest elections at all levels, including to Panchayats to further deepen democracy"

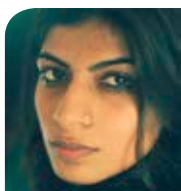
In April, Leader of Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad introduced a private member's bill in the Rajya Sabha to amend the Constitution. Azad's bill seeks



to override the amendments passed in Rajasthan and Haryana by making the right to contest elections a fundamental right.

Also in April, the National Commission of Scheduled Castes issued notifications to both state governments, asking them to respond to the exclusionary aspects of the amendments within 15 days.

While these steps are being taken, the people affected by these amendments continue to wait in limbo, twice humiliated – once by the state government and once by the Supreme Court – for reasons of systemic oppression and a profound failure of the state.



**SHREYA ILA ANASUYA**

Currently editor of the *Sexuality and Disability* blog at the organisation Point of View, Shreya Ila Anasuya has been widely published in Indian media; in *The Wire*, *Scroll*, *Mint Lounge*, *The Hindu Business Line*, *Helter Skelter* and *Deep Dives*. She was the India delegate at the South Asia Young Women Leaders Dialogue organised by the High Commissions of Canada in India and Sri Lanka in 2017. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Feature

## WHAT MANIPURI WOMEN ARE DOING FOR THE CURRENT PROTEST. WHAT THE CURRENT PROTESTS COULD BE DOING FOR THE MANIPURI WOMEN

*www.theladiesfinger.com, September 28, 2015*



In the midst of the wreckage, gunshots and deaths in Manipur at the moment, the high political participation of women from different tribal communities has become more visible.

On 31 August this year, violent clashes broke out between protesters and police in Churachandpur, a tribal-dominated hill district in Manipur, after three tribal legislators' residences were burnt down. The arson was a result of the anger and sense of betrayal that the Thadou-Kuki, Naga and Chin Zomi tribal communities felt towards their voted representatives for allowing the passage of three bills that day in the State Assembly – the Protection of Manipur People Bill, the Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill and the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh Amendment) Bill. The death of three protesters that night, two from live ammunition fired by the police allegedly without warning, further agitated the protesters. Soon, Churachandpur became the epicentre of the tribal agitation, demanding a separate administration from the Manipur state government. The tribals in the state believe there are loopholes in the bills which threaten their indigenous status and claim over the constitutionally protected hill districts. In the days that followed, peaceful demonstrations quickly turned violent as hundreds of protesters vandalized and burned down residences of state representatives along with government offices. In all the chaos that ensued, nine men died in the short span of a week, six from excessive police force, including a ten-year-old boy.

The women were initially on the sidelines of the movement. Their concerted efforts at taming tempers were hardly noticed, even as they went about raising the decibel level of their demands for peaceful rallies. Just days after



protesters burnt down the gates of a police station, thousands from the tribal communities showed up at the first meeting on 3 September, called by the Joint Action Committee (JAC) formed by different tribal groups to negotiate their policy demands with the state. Esther Mate, a local from Tuibuang village in Churachandpur district, who was present at the meeting, said that the women's role in holding the movement together first gained prominence in this meeting that was held in a public playground: "There were men who were getting violent in their reactions and were again heading towards the police station. About 1,000 women assembled in a line outside the station and kept them from getting inside." Had it not been for the women that day, more lives would have surely been lost.

The protests, that began more than three weeks ago, have seen a less than adequate response and little effort at dialogue by the government. Frustrations have reached a boiling point and the dead, declared martyrs of the movement, are still lying in the morgue. Women have been working in shifts, participating in night-and-day dharnas to voice their protest against the three bills. However, their strength is not just in numbers but also in their capacity for binding non-tribal communities together, not to mention ensuring their safety. In her locality, Esther said that a few non-tribal women from Bihar also participated in a few dharnas, and Meitei women, mostly shopkeepers, provided refreshments like water or juice to the protesters. "This has turned into a women's movement now. Even the JAC are depending on the tribal women because if all the men assemble, there would likely be violence. Everything is peaceful since the women have taken up the movement," she said. However, the participation of non-tribals cannot necessarily be seen as a sign of solidarity or agreement with tribal demands. While Esther said that outsiders like Biharis joined in the protests since the bills affect them too, Mary Beth Sanate, a human rights defender who has been working in Manipur for the last 10 years, thinks they're just honoring tribal customs. "In tribal society, it's customary to make a contribution as part of their condolence when someone dies. Shopkeepers have been coming sometimes because that's a social practice, anyway," she said. As a part of this practice, people from different communities pooled money and built a memorial for the tribal martyrs.

On 19 September, a cloudy Saturday, around 10,000 women from various tribes took to the highway to form a 12km human chain from Kangvai district (on the border between Churachandpur and the valley district of Bishnupur) to the district hospital in Churachandpur town. Dressed in black, these women broke all records of peaceful demonstrations, never witnessed before on such a scale in Manipur. Seen in the human chain were many young women wearing t-shirts printed with messages of solidarity, and nupis (older women)

as old as 70 years, walking 24km in the erratic weather shifting between scorching heat and rain. A few non-tribal women also voluntarily joined the human chain, said Mary Beth. She told me that the women were divided about letting non-tribal women join these demonstrations, feeling that these protests were related to protecting tribal culture and resources, while others were okay with their participation, so long as it wasn't at the forefront of policy making decisions. She clarifies to say, "This is not a communal issue but an agitation directed at the Manipur government."

The violence in protests and policing has mostly been confined to Churachandpur, yet tribal communities in other hill districts like Moreh, Kangpokpi, Senapati, Ukhrul and Chandel have also carried out big rallies to show their solidarity to the movement. Valley Rose, a Tangkhul woman who runs The Aja Daily newspaper from Imphal, said that the demand for justice for the dead is very strong and that the tribal communities won't just let go of this issue. "For the loss of one boy's life in the plains, the government has agreed to their demands, given large compensation and built a memorial on a hillock. The government has not shown anything to the tribals, who feel they must get the respect and justice due to them."



Women in Manipur (both the valley and the hills) have often been praised for enforcing peaceful means in protests and demonstrations. Yet they must not be seen as 'Bambis' in the midst of these protests, given the strong reactions they've displayed when pushed into a corner. Angered by the restorative work started on Health Minister Phungzathang Tonsing's house while their martyrs' bodies still lay in the morgue, women protesters in Churachandpur torched his residence for the

third time on 18 September. More recently, a mob of women protesters torched the residence of Thanlianpau Guite, Zomi Revolution Organization leader, on 26 September for allegedly preventing the hill area MLAs from resigning, as demanded by the tribal protesters. JL Sawmi, a woman spokesperson of the JAC, explains that women have kept the men away from loitering on the streets, or participating in any agitation, for fear of losing more lives. "The womenfolk were angry at the ZRO President as they believe him to be colluding with the state government, whereas their demand is for a separate administration," she said.

In 2004, outraged by the injustice in the investigation of the rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama Devi, allegedly by Assam Rifles security forces personnel, Manipuri women made a statement by protesting naked with banners, screaming "Indian army rape us" outside the Assam Rifles headquarters in Imphal.

In Churachandpur district, tribal women's groups like the Zomi Mothers, Hmar Women Association and Kuki Women Union are structurally organized with strong units at village levels. Working on a voluntary basis, women leaders in these groups are elected on a rotational basis and work on issues related to violence against women, alcoholism and administrative problems of water and electricity supply. Mary Beth says these women's groups have jumped in and intervened in conflicts in the town in the past, even when there's been armed conflict between the Indian military and local militant groups. But has their level of participation been affected when conflicts have occurred between tribal groups? In the 90s, ethnic clashes broke out between the Kuki, Paite and Naga tribes across the hill districts, with Churachandpur being one of the worst affected districts. Mary Beth said, "Tribal women groups, who normally work with each other, were swept away by the current of inter-tribal conflicts and, for a while they did not talk to each other. However, when it subsided, they were the first to start the restorative work, helping those affected with basic necessities like food and clothing. The Kuki Women Union gathered all the orphans from the war and started an orphanage with their own resources."

While their visibility at Ground Zero has been instrumental to the protests, women have not been involved at the level of decision-making. Very few women were participating at that level for almost a week into the protests, said Mary, who was recently appointed a JAC member. She said, "Women have jumped in and questioned the menfolk about the pitiful representation of women in these committees, even though they constitute about 90 percent of the agitation. Women are playing multiple roles in this movement – they are protesting, controlling the violence, negotiating with police not to open fire,

safeguarding government institutions and organizing curfews.” After much deliberation, the JAC still has only 11 women among its 112 members and not a single woman on the core committee working on drafting proposals and negotiating policy demands with the state.

Despite their mobility and doggedness, Mary feels that there is a need for women’s collectives to take a strategic stand in the midst of violence and state repression, given the high risk of being swayed by vested interests. She said, “Their daily peace and security is at high risk. They lack legal knowledge. They lost their daily incomes and left home the whole day to be in the streets.” Still, men are more or less exclusively at the helm of both planning and decision making in the movement, with most women on the ground often not being well-informed enough about the progress of the movement or the next plan of action. “We usually take their feedback and report it back to the JAC. But for all our work, the society or the government still does not recognize women’s groups and there are no provisions for us to support this work,” said Mary Beth. As the movement rallies for equal representation of the hill district people’s interests in state matters, it is high time the leaders take cognizance of issues of representation in the movement itself.



#### **MAKEPEACE SITLHOU**

Makepeace Sitlhou is a freelance journalist covering human rights, social justice and identity politics in India. Her work has appeared in The Wire, Scroll, The Ladies Finger, The News Minute, NDTV, The Indian Express, The Sunday Guardian, Mint Lounge and The Huffington Post among other places. She is based out of Bangalore. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best E-Magazine Article

## IF YOU THOUGHT IT WAS EASY FOR GARMENT WORKERS TO PROTEST FOR THEIR PF, YOU NEED TO READ THIS

*www.theladiesfinger.com, April 22, 2016*

**O**n an average day, Savitri wakes early, gets her daughter ready for school, and rushes off to Shahi Exports Pvt Ltd, the garment factory that she works at in Bommanahalli in Bangalore, for her 9am shift. Her day involves sewing from 9 to 5.30pm, with a half-hour break for lunch. But high production targets often mean that she has to stay late in order to finish, doing unpaid overtime. Being yelled at all the time by male supervisors is another aspect of her work that makes her blood boil. When it gets too much and they yell back, she says, they're told to leave or not to come to work for a few days. There's plenty that Savitri, who moved to Bangalore with her daughter 13 years ago from Tamil Nadu, is upset about at work, but on April 16, when she read in the Kannada newspapers that the central government had decided to change the rules for withdrawing Provident Fund (PF) – so that workers would only be allowed to withdraw the employee contribution to the PF, while the employer contribution could only be withdrawn after they retired at 58 – that was the last straw. This meant that there would be no money to spend on education for workers' children, for medical emergencies, paying back loans or paying rent, marriages, or anything else they might choose to spend their money on.

Like many of her colleagues, she panicked. She arrived at the factory that day to find women already standing outside, demanding information about the new rules. Two days later, on Monday, April 18, she went to work again and joined many other women in Bommanahalli in a sudden, unplanned protest against the PF rule. It was calm at first – the women around her, from her factory and from others, seemed confused and then got angrier as they began to march. Savitri says the yelling seemed to become more and more frantic, and when nothing else seemed to be happening towards the evening, she left and returned home earlier than usual that day. It was no small-time protest: Savitri was one of around an estimated 1.2 lakh garment workers, overwhelmingly female, who took to the streets in Bommanahalli, Hosur Road, Peenya, and Jalahalli Cross that day, refusing to work. The protests were spontaneous and had no leaders. Traffic was held up for hours, and police lathi charged protestors and fired teargas shells at them. Some protestors pelted stones at buses and police stations, and set buses on fire. Parts of the city came to a standstill, and the unrest spilled over to the next day. Finally, on April 19, the Central Government announced it would roll back the original

notification at the “request of trade unions” in response to the protests and said it was contemplating allowing the withdrawal of PF accumulations on grounds such as marriage, serious illness, house purchase and children’s professional education.

While commuters in the city may have seen the protests as a nuisance, with blocked roads and bumper-to-bumper traffic, they owe the women who stepped out to protest a massive debt: the majority of them, like Savitri, were not affiliated to unions, and their stance means that everyone, from IT employees in Bangalore to factory workers in Delhi, can now have access to their PF when needed.

It’s happened before

In July 2001, garment factory workers had protested in Peenya for the same reason – women had poured out onto the streets on hearing that a new rule would make it impossible for them to withdraw their PF until they were 45 years old. The events then seem to have unfolded the same way – roads were blocked, violence broke out and no leaders were named in the sudden, surprising protest. The protest lasted a day. Janaki Nair, professor of history and chronicler of Bangalore’s worker movements, wrote in *The Telegraph* that most of the media slipped into calling the workers a “rampaging mob”, describing the stone-pelting and buses on fire in detail, but never returning to understand the issues underlying their protest.

And the broader unrest among garment workers springs to the surface from time to time. The most recent protest in the city by garment workers was in February 2016, fighting for better rights and better working conditions.

Yashodha, an Executive Committee Member of the Garment Labour Union (GLU), Bangalore, who participated in the protests, called the Central Government’s decision earlier decision on PF withdrawal “luti” – not just stealing, but taking away indiscriminately. That this should arrive on top of the existing problems facing garment workers seemed particularly harsh. The turnover rates at garment factories are extremely high, says Yashoda – “Who can work until they are 58 years old in a workspace that doesn’t provide them with basic rights and facilities?” Yashodha asks.

“People were angry and they were scared,” Yashodha says. “Very often, any small issue can mean that a worker loses their job. Those who are in charge don’t even have to say that they are terminating our job, all they say is, “naale inda kelsakke barbeda”, “don’t come to work from tomorrow”, and we can’t go to work anymore.” Yashodha laughs in the same way that she does when she



talks about doing “OC kelsa”, or free extra work, because they are told that they haven’t met their already high production targets. The targets depend on the piece they are working on – it’s lower for trousers, and also depend on the brand making the clothes (some are for large international brands like Banana Republic and H&M), or the kind of stitches involved. Shanthi, a garment factory worker, says that the production targets have been increased at her workplace, “They used to be about 50 [items] in an hour, which we could do. But now they want 80-90 per hour.”

Yashodha is quick to point out that on paper, workers are supposed to get a lot of things. “According to the law we can have 14 days of leave, but we never get any leave even for emergencies. Someone has died in our family in the village and we aren’t allowed to go. If we go for a day or two without leave, we are asked to quit work,” she says.

Workers also face restrictions on unionising. Anyone who does unionise or mobilise support for an issue is immediately asked to leave – Rukmini, currently the President of GLU, wasn’t allowed to continue her work when she joined the union. Instead, Yashodha says that they are sometimes given money, and are removed from work – “they have all these tricks,” she says. Workplace harassment is common, the women say. In February 2007, Ammu, a migrant garment factory worker committed suicide in Bangalore after being harassed by her male supervisors, and in October 2007, Renuka, also a garment factory worker, committed suicide after harassment. “They’re always yelling at us,” Savitri says. Shanti says that when they try to tell their superiors about their problems, nobody listens, “All they say is that it’s in the rules.”



Surabhi Sharma made two short films on garment workers in Bangalore a decade ago, and it is as though nothing has changed since then. The interviews with women working at these garment factories all show that the yelling and harassment has continued – in *Labels from a Global City* (you can watch Part 1 and Part 2 of it online) a scene shows women workers are standing on their terrace and imitating their supervisors being demanding, rude and unreasonable. The film also includes a conversation with Ammu’s mother that shows how easy it is for employers to slip out of their responsibilities and avoid blame.

Gopinath Parakuni of Cividep, an organisation that works in the field of workers’ rights and focuses on garment workers, says around 80 percent of garment workers are women, and sexual harassment at the workplace is common. Most cases of sexual violence go by without being reported, and women who assert themselves face a backlash. “There is no guarantee or contract to the job. If you anger anybody, you lose your job and have to change factories, there’s nothing else to be done. And when that happens, the whole household collapses – then there might be a new requirement for stay, and new schools have to be found for children,” he adds. “For all this, we get minimum wage and no money for the extra hours of work put in,” Savitri says.

“Women working in these factories usually come from families where the husbands do small, informal jobs as coolies or painters, with no certainty of pay,” Yashodha says. This means that the households are run by these women who travel to the city, are required to take care of food, rent, education and marriage of their children, health, and yet remain at the receiving end of all kinds of difficulties. The PF, then, becomes important, “We are not like people with PhDs, working as professors, for whom the new rule will make no difference,” she adds.

While the new PF rules triggered the unrest and here are still a lot of issues that the women would like addressed, Savitri says, “I have a daughter’s education to take care of, and a house to run, and I can’t do it all on my salary. This was the most immediate problem that I needed solved. For now, I just need to know that I can get my PF.”



#### **ILA ANANYA**

Ila Ananya is a staff writer at the feminist online magazine *The Ladies Finger*, who also writes fiction. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Feature

# Programme Implementation

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In this section we have an interesting selection of investigative reports on the implementation of various programmes, laws and policies by the government and its agencies.

Post Nirbhaya incident, both State and Central Governments had promised to invest in a number of institutions to facilitate better support to the survivors of sexual violence. Laxmi Prasanna Ajai and Jasmine Lovely George look at two institutions - the Nirbhaya Shelter Homes in Kerala and the One Stop Centres located within hospitals of Delhi for survivors of sexual violence. While the Shelter Homes have become, in reality, labour rooms with a number of pregnant adolescents delivering babies in the shelters; the One Stop Centres are conspicuous by their absence in most of the hospitals in Delhi. This shows a gap between the intentions and implementation at the ground level.

Sonam Ranawat exposes a similar instance of apathy and insensitivity of the railway authorities who turn a blind eye to the misuse of a breast feeding centre by men, who use it as a waiting room.

The patriarchal values and norms often influence the way the programmes are implemented. One such case is highlighted by Teena Bairagi. The insensitivity and gendered mindsets of the authorities of government shelter homes vested with the responsibility of getting the inmates married are apparent when they declare women with fertility issues as "Not Fit For Marriage" and therefore branding them for life.

The medical mal-practices and inefficiency in health system is yet another area where media could play a big role in creating awareness. The poor implementation of health programmes in Odisha and community response to the same, the commercialization of health services promoting unnecessary hysterectomies and the burgeoning IVF industry and the unethical medical practices like unsafe egg donations by young women and the unregulated surrogacy industry are exposed by Tazeen Qureshy, Saroj Shukla, and Kamalpathi Rao, respectively.

While Priyanka Kaushal delves into the Swachh Bharat programme and its implementation at the ground level, Shazia Yousuf writes about the increased harassment of women in public transport in Kashmir and apathy of the authorities to the same.

Last but not the least, Prasanna Rao Kadamandala discusses the pros and cons of the controversy around the misuse of the 498 A asserting its importance to large number of women who are victims of domestic violence.

The above articles hold a mirror to the policy maker and reveal the wide gap between programme formulation and implementation.

## CONCERN OVER SHELTER HOMES TURNING INTO LABOUR ROOMS

*The Times of India, April 25, 2016*

*Monitoring Agency Writes To Social Justice Dept To End Practice*

**A** pregnant teen, who is a victim of sexual abuse, gave birth to a baby girl at Nirbhaya shelter home on Friday, through caesarean. She is one among the over 20 pregnant girls who gave birth at Nirbhaya shelter homes in the last one year.

This has prompted Kerala Mahila Samakhya Society (KMSS), which is entrusted by the state to supervise and run Nirbhaya shelter homes in the state, to approach social justice department (SJD), seeking steps to prevent their premises being used as a conduit for pregnancy and delivery services of the victims.

Meanwhile, the 15-year-old from the city who had caesarean delivery with the support of doctors and KMSS officials here, was sent back home with her mother. According to KMSS officials, earlier, an orphan girl was sent back with the sister of the man who got her pregnant, after delivery. Similarly a rape victim from Ranni, who was abused by her uncle, was sent back to the same place after delivery. Being victims of abuse, the teens mostly surrender their new born to child welfare committee (CWC), following which the CWC declares somebody as a 'fit person' to send the victim back with. Apparently, many activists question the logic behind declaring the sister of accused rapist as the fit person to provide accommodation to the victim.

"How can these girls be sent back to the same places where they are unsafe," asked KMSS project director P E Usha. She said she would write to SJD officials to prevent such a trend.

Currently, eight Nirbhaya homes across the state have around 250 inmates under the supervision of KMSS. The expenditure incurred for these eight home is about Rs 24 lakh. However these shelter homes are running short of funds due to delay in advance payments by the state SJD. Though the state reimburses based on expenditure report given by KMSS, very often it gets delayed.

## SEEKING HELP

finds it difficult to meet the expenses involved

➤ As many as 20 teenagers, who are victims of sexual abuse, gave birth in at Nirbhaya shelter homes in the last one year



➤ KMSS, which runs the homes, approaches social justice department seeking steps to prevent their premises being used as a conduit for pregnancy and child delivery services of the victims

➤ The shelter homes which run on a shoestring budget

Meanwhile, member of Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KeSCPCR) Fr Phillip Parakkat said, agencies running the Nirbhaya shelter homes in the state, including KMSS, had brought the issues to the notice of the commission. "Yet, Nirbhaya shelter has to be for short term care of girls and they cannot be kept beyond eight months or one year," he said. "KMSS or other agencies can set up a separate children's home or care home to ensure extended care of the children," he said.



### LAXMI PRASANNA AJAI

Laxmi Prasanna is currently working as Principal Correspondent with Times Of India Thiruvananthapuram. She sees journalism as a medium to reach out and bring a positive social transformation and is dedicated to the pursuit of truth backed by proof to bring justice for the vulnerable mainly women and children. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Investigative Report

# पुरुषों का आरामगाह बना रेलवे का बेबी फीडिंग सेन्टर

Rajasthan Patrika, September 18, 2016

म

हिलाएं शिशुओं को आहार कक्ष के बाहर करवा रही स्तनपान अजमेर रेलवे स्टेशन पर महिला यात्रियों के लिए बने बेबी फीडिंग सेन्टर पर पुरुषों का कब्जा है। ऐसे में महिलाएं प्लेटफॉर्म पर ही सैंकड़ों यात्रियों के सामने अपने दुधमुहें बच्चों को स्तनपान कराने पर मजबूर हैं। शनिवार को स्टेशन के बेबी फीडिंग सेन्टर पर यही हालात नजर आए।

रेलवे प्रशासन ने पिछले माह बेबी फीडिंग सेन्टर की शुरुआत की थी। अपनी दुध मुहें बच्चों के साथ प्लेटफॉर्म पर ट्रेन का इंतजार करने वाली महिलाओं के लिए यह बेहतर सौगात थी। लेकिन रेलवे कर्मचारियों की लापरवाही और अनदेखी की वजह से इसका उपयोग महिलाओं से अधिक पुरुष कर रहे हैं। स्टेशन पर बिना वजह घूमने वाले लोगों सहित खान-पान की स्टॉल्स पर काम करने वाले भी मौका मिलते ही इस आरामदायक कमरे में बैठ कर सुस्ता लेते हैं। हैरत की बात यह है कि चप्पे-चप्पे पर तैनात रेलवे सुरक्षा बल व जीआरपी के जवानों को फीडिंग सेन्टर में पुरुषों की मौजूदगी नजर नहीं आती, या देखने के बाद भी आंखें मूंद लेते हैं।

गुजरात से दरगाह जियारत के लिए आई २५ वर्षीय नूरजहां बीबी ने बताया कि बच्चे को दूध पिलाने के लिए जब वह शिशु आहार गृह पहुंची तो वहां एक पुरुष आराम फरमा रहा था। कई बार उस व्यक्ति को उठाना चाहा तो वह नींद से नहीं जागा बच्चे को भूख लगी थी। लिहाजा मजबूरन फीडिंग सेन्टर के बाहर बैठकर ही स्तनपान करवाना पड़ा।

## मंडल रेलवे प्रबंधक पुनित वांवला का बयान

फीडिंग सेन्टर के आसपास आरपीएफ के जवान तैनात रहते हैं। अन्दर कोई पुरुष सो रहा था तो महिलाओं को इसकी शिकायत रेलवे स्टाफ को करनी चाहिए थी। फिर भी वहां नजर रखने की विशेष हिदायत दी जाएगी।



**SONAM RANWAT**

A Master's in Journalism Sonam Ranawat, reports for Rajasthan Patrika. Her main areas of interest are gender related issues. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best News Report

## “नॉट फिट फॉर मैरिज”

**News Today**

महिला सदन से ससुराल के रास्ते बाधा बनी मेडिकल रिपोर्ट

मातृत्व क्षमता नहीं होने को आधार बना विवाह सूची से किया बाहर, महिला सदन से ससुराल के रास्ते बाधा बनी मेडिकल रिपोर्ट पहली बार प्रक्रिया में 23 साल से बड़ी उम्र की युवतियां होंगी शामिल

**ए** क ओर आज देशभर में मां की पूजा की जा रही है। वही दूसरी ओर जयपुर के महिला सदन में मातृत्व क्षमता नहीं होने पर कुछ लड़कियों को शादी के लिए अनफिट करार दे दिया गया है। डोली में बैठना और पिया के घर जाना हर लड़की का सपना होता है इस भावनात्मक रिश्ते की डोर से बंधकर गृहस्थी बसाने की चाह हर लड़की की होती है लेकिन यह चाह उन लड़कियों के लिए उस वक्त एक सदमे में बदल गई जब उन्हें “नॉट फिट फॉर मैरिज” की सूची में डाल दिया गया। इसके पीछे उन्हें तर्क ये दिया गया कि उनमें मातृत्व क्षमता नहीं है। सवाल यह है कि क्या मातृत्व क्षमता ही शादी का आधार है।

दरअसल, इस कुतर्क का दंश सामाजिक न्याय एवं अधिकारिता विभाग के प्रताप नगर स्थित महिला सदन की उन लड़कियों को मिला है, जो अपने विवाह की तैयारी में खोई सी थी। मगर एक मेडिकल रिपोर्ट ने उनके पिया के आंगन जाने के सपने को तोड़ दिया। सदन की 26 लड़कियों को विवाह बंधन में बांधे जाने की कवायद चल रही है इसके लिए विवाह के इच्छुक युवकों से 31 मार्च तक आवेदन मांगे गए हैं। जिसके बाद आपसी परिचय और पसंद के आधार पर जोड़े तय होंगे, जिनकी लग्न तिथि 28 मई तय की गई है, इससे पूर्व स्वास्थ्य अधिकारियों द्वारा इनका मेडिकल चेकअप कराया गया। रिपोर्ट में कुछ लड़कियों को मातृत्व क्षमता नहीं होने के आधार पर शादी के लिए अनफिट बताया गया। रिपोर्ट से इन लड़कियों को धक्का लगा है। राज्य सरकार की ओर से चल रहे महिला सदन, बालिका गृह जैसी संस्थाओं में रहनेवाली युवतियों और महिलाओं की शादी करवाने से पूर्व संस्था संचालन नियम 1971 के रूल नंबर 21 के तहत मेडिकल कराना जरूरी है।

**सजाए थे सपने -**

विभाग के अनुसार इस साल सदन में 26 लड़कियों की शादी होनी है। इनमें 10 मूक-बध्दिर है। इस सभी की उम्र 18 से 47 के बीच है। इस संबंध में सभी संभाग स्तरीय नारी

निकेतनों को दिशा निर्देश भेज दिए गए हैं। लड़कों का चयन होने और उनकी होम स्टडी के बाद विवाह होंगे। विवाह बंधन में बंधने वाली 26 लड़कियां मेडिकली अनफिट बताई गई हैं। इनमें 2 की रिपोर्ट आना बाकी है। ऐसे में अब ये लड़कियां मानसिक परेशानी का सामना कर रही हैं।

**इनका कहना है** – श्रद्धा गौतम, अधीक्षक महिला सदन, प्रतापनगर

मातृत्व क्षमता नहीं होने के कारण इन लड़कियों की शादी नहीं कराने की बात मेडिकल रिपोर्ट कहती है, लेकिन हम आवेदन करने वाले लड़कों व उनके परिवार के साथ काउंसलिंग करेंगे।



#### TEENA BAIRAGI

A Senior Reporter with News Today, Teena Bairagi has been effectively using her writing skills towards covering various aspects of the lives of women and children by highlighting their plight and challenges and also by focusing on positive stories of women who have successfully overcome gender barriers. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best News Report



## WHERE ARE THE 'ONE STOP CENTERS' FOR RAPE SURVIVORS PROMISED BY THE NIRBHAYA FUND

*www.theladiesfinger.com, January 29, 2016*

**I**n March 2015, on the occasion of International Women's Day, Maneka Gandhi announced that "One Stop Centres" would be set up by August 2015. These centres were meant to simplify matters for female victims and survivors of violence, where a number of institutions would be brought under one roof so they wouldn't have to run between institutions for redressal. The aim was to bring together the police, medical professionals and psychological counselors under the same roof, reflecting a shift in criminal jurisprudence and attempting to make the victim's relationship with these processes less complicated.

At Hidden Pockets, an initiative I started to locate and map services around sexual and reproductive health services in Delhi, our team visited government hospitals in November and December 2015 to assess the services provided by OSCs. According to the Press Information Bureau (PIB), six had already been set up in Delhi. We went to five hospitals across the city: AIIMS, Safdarjung Hospital, RML Hospital, GTB Hospital and Deen Dayal Hospital. But when we went in search of these centres, forget functional centres – we found that barely anyone at the hospitals we visited even knew they were meant to have them.

In April 2015, the Ministry of Women and Child Development released the One Stop Centre (OSC) Implementation Guidelines for State Governments/UT Administrations. According to the guidelines, government hospitals should establish OSCs for free assistance for any forms of violence against women.

The OSC is a room established within hospital premises and is meant to include services like assistance in lodging FIRs, medical assistance for medical examinations, and counsellors for therapy after an incident. Searching the board at AIIMS, Delhi for a mention of the One Stop Centre. We didn't find it. Photo by Pallavi.

Finding these rooms in the first place was the biggest hurdle we faced during our mapping exercise. "Ye OSC kya hota hain," was generally the question we were asked back. No information boards, reception areas, or public health



co-ordinators existed to lead us to these centres – no one seemed to know if they even existed. Some of the hospitals we visited had maps at the entrance: they contained no mention of an OSC. At AIIMS and Safdarjung Hospital, the nurses and guards were not aware about OSCs and were only able to guide us to casualty wards. We had to keep using the narrative of “rape” (although OSCs are not limited to sexual violence) to get any response from service providers.

The police personnel at Safdarjung Hospital were confused when we asked them if we could lodge complaints there. They told us, “Yahan kaise hoga? Apne area mein kar ke aao, yahan hum ye sab nahin karte.” In all five hospitals, there was no provision to lodge an FIR, and we were informed that we would have to lodge FIRs with police in our respective jurisdictions. Gynaecologists were not available at any of the hospitals, and had to be called in from other departments. The same went for counsellors.

A standard experience at the hospitals we visited was that nurses and guards would keep staring at us when we asked about the centre. We used different Hindi words to make them understand, but it was only when we used the word rape that they would lead us to the casualty ward. This would sometimes lead to interesting conversations among the staff, where they would debate about the fact whether there was such a centre at all. Deen Dayal hospital had none of the recommended provisions. At AIIMS, one of the nurses told us that there was nothing like an OSC there, but she was confident about the fact that Safdarjung Hospital had one, and asked us to go there. At Safdarjung, the staff were mostly clueless about the OSC, though some doctors were helpful in directing us to the Medical Superintendent, who they thought would be able to tell us more.



The 'women's department' at Safdarjung, where we told we would find it. Yes, this building's functional. No, there isn't a One Stop Centre. And, as we were told, entry is only for pregnant women. Photo by Pallavi.

One of the strangest experiences we had was at RML Hospital – the staff appeared fully informed about the OSC centres, but they weren't willing to direct us to the one in their hospital. They were suspicious that we were on some sort of sting, and kept insisting on meeting the victim directly before revealing the location of the centre. The doctors refused to hear our queries and instead asked us if we were from an NGO. We figured out that there was probably no centre after all. In spite of repeated requests to meet the concerned authorities, there was no one who could respond to our queries. The nurses would send us in one direction, the guards would send us somewhere else, the doctors would be too busy to even answer.

GTB Hospital was where we had the most encouraging experience – it did have provisions for a place for victims to come and get themselves checked, though there was still no FIR or counseling service. The staff here were better informed and were willing to help us with queries

The aim of setting up OSCs is to improve the services provided to a victim or survivor of violence. They are meant to have a dedicated set of service providers who will always be on call. Instead, what we found was that

hospitals were deploying staff already working in other departments for the purpose. There was a lack of sensitisation to dealing with possible victims of violence, and most of them felt fatigued and over-worked. Having to work at the OSC (however poorly set-up) in addition, was a strain on their already packed schedules.

In December 2015, in response to a question raised in Parliament regarding the utilisation of the Nirbhaya Fund, Maneka Gandhi confirmed that 31 OSCs would be established, for which ₹10.71 crore had been released. According to the Press Information Bureau, six OSCs are operational – one each in Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh), Karnal (Haryana), Bhubaneswar (Odisha), Jaipur (Rajasthan) and Chandigarh.

As part of the mapping study, we filed RTIs, to check on the status of the OSCs. AIIMS responded: "It is informed that there are two rooms allocated for one stop centre, one is allocated for counselling and second is for examination." That wasn't what we had experienced when we visited in person. Safdarjung responded with regard to service providers, "Counselors are available under (DCW) Delhi commission for Women on 'as & when' required basis." In person, we failed to even find the rooms, let alone find the service providers.

At the end of it all, we're still confused – do OSCs exist or not? We didn't find it a one-stop experience; in fact, there were plenty of stops before we were guided to a room with a service provider (if it existed at all).



#### **JASMINE LOVELY GEORGE**

Jasmine Lovely George is the founder of Feminist startup Hidden Pockets. She conducts mapping studies on cities and health. She is a lawyer and has been working on issues of sexuality and spaces ( physical and digital). As a writer she has written for The Ladies Finger, Open Democracy and TARSHI. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Article

# श से शौचालय विहीन

www.tehelkahindi.com, October 15, 2014

छत्तीसगढ़ में हजारों लड़कियां स्कूल जाना सिर्फ इसलिए छोड़ देती हैं क्योंकि यहां शौचालय नहीं हैं



त इसी पंद्रह अगस्त की है। स्वतंत्रता दिवस के अवसर पर लाल किले की प्रचीर से दिए गए प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के भाषण की। वह ऐसा भाषण था जिसकी पूरे देश में चर्चा हुई। कई लोग इससे प्रभावित भी हुए होंगे लेकिन कुछ के लिए वह उनके पुराने जख्म कुरेदने वाला साबित हुआ। हम यहां राजनीतिक जख्मों की बात नहीं कर रहे हैं। दरअसल प्रधानमंत्री ने उस दिन बेझिझक स्वीकार करते हुए यह कहा था कि देश के अधिकांश स्कूलों में शौचालय नहीं हैं। यह बात छत्तीसगढ़ के धमतरी में रहने वाली 13 साल की सुनीता (बदला हुआ नाम) को इतना परेशान कर गई कि वे तुरंत रुआंसी हो गई। सुनीता बताती है, 'मुझे लगा जैसे प्रधानमंत्री मेरी ही बात कर रहे थे। हमारे यहां तो कोई सुनता-समझता ही नहीं कि हम लड़कियां को बिना शौचालय वाले स्कूलों में क्या झेलना पड़ता है। 'सुनीता बेशक राज्य की सभी लड़कियों की बात कर रही थीं लेकिन ऐसे स्कूल से जुड़ी खुद उनकी आपबीती हमारी शिक्षा व्यवस्था के एक खतरनाक पक्ष को उजागर करती है। एक साल पहले तक एक सरकारी स्कूल की सातवीं कक्षा की छात्रा थीं। यहां लड़कियों का शौचालय नहीं है इसलिए वे स्कूल से कुछ दूरी पर खड़े खंडहर को शौचालय की तरह इस्तेमाल करती हैं। आमतौर पर लड़कियां यहां अकेले नहीं जाती बल्कि अपनी किसी सहेली के साथ जाती हैं। लेकिन एक दिन सुनीता को लघुशंका के लिए वहां अकेले जाना पड़ा। उन्हें इसबात का कतई अंदाजा नहीं था कि वह खंडहर उनके लिए किसी तरह खतरनाक साबित हो सकता है। सुनीता जब वहां नित्यकर्म से निवृत्त हो रही थीं तभी वहां कुछ लड़के आ गए जो शायद कई दिनों से यहां आनेवाली लड़कियों पर नजर रखे हुए थे। इससे पहले की सुनीता कुछ समझ पाती दो लड़कों उसे दबोच लिया। लेकिन शायद सुनीता की किस्मत कुछ अच्छी थी कि ठीक उसी समय स्कूल की कुछ और लड़कियां वहां आ गईं और उनके शोर मचाने के बाद ये लड़के भाग गए। किसी अनहोनी घटना से बच जाना इस सातवीं की छात्रा के लिए बहुत अच्छी बात रही लेकिन इस घटना के बाद वह कभी स्कूल नहीं जा पाई। उसके माता-पिता आज भी ऐसे स्कूल में अपनी बेटी को भेजने के लिए तैयार नहीं है। उस घटना के बाद खुद सुनीता भी स्कूल नहीं जाना चाहती लेकिन उसे यह बात सालती रहती है कि अब वह किताबों की उस दुनिया में कभी नहीं लौट पाएगी जो उसे बहुत अच्छी लगती थी। प्रधानमंत्री के भाषण ने उसके इसी जख्म को अनजाने में ही फिर कुरेद दिया था।

यदि हम छत्तीसगढ़ में शिक्षा व्यवस्था के बुनियादी ढांचे को देखें तो यह बात साफ समझ में आती है यहां सुनीता जैसी एक नहीं बल्कि और भी लड़कियां होंगी जिन्होंने ऐसी ही कुछ घटनाओं की वजह से स्कूल जाना छोड़ा होगा। ऐसी

लड़कियों की संख्या का कोई सीधा आंकड़ा तो दिया जाना मुमकिन नहीं है। लेकिन दूसरे आंकड़ों से यह बात साबित होती है कि राज्य में शौचालय विहीन स्कूलों की वजह से कई छात्र-छात्राओं को एक अलग तरह की दिक्कत का सामना करना पड़ रहा होगा।

ऊपर लिखी बातें हैरान इसलिए करती हैं क्योंकि कभी सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी में तरक्की तो कभी धान के उत्पादन के लिए, तो कभी सावर्जनिक वितरण प्रणाली को कम्प्यूटरीकृत करने के लिए देश में अक्ल रहने वाला छत्तीसगढ़ अब पिछड़ा राज्य नहीं कहलाता। हर साल प्रति व्यक्ति आय में तेजी से हो रही बढ़ोत्तरी छत्तीसगढ़ की आर्थिक समृद्धि का प्रतीक बनती जा रही है। राज्य सरकार के दावे के अनुसार 2011-12 में जहां राज्य की प्रति व्यक्ति आय 44 हजार 505 रुपए थी वह 2012-13 में 50 हजार 691 रुपए हो गई। वर्ष 2013-14 में यह 56 हजार 990 रुपए होने का अनुमान है। लेकिन इसके बावजूद छत्तीसगढ़ उन राज्यों में भी शुमार है, जहां हजारों स्कूलों में आज भी शौचालय नहीं हैं और जहां हैं, वे उपयोग करने लायक स्थिति में नहीं हैं। छत्तीसगढ़ में 47 हजार 526 स्कूल हैं। इनमें 17 हजार से ज्यादा स्कूलों में छात्रों और छात्राओं दोनों के लिए शौचालय ही नहीं हैं। इनमें प्रदेश के 8 हजार 164 कन्या विद्यालय भी शामिल हैं। कुछ समय पहले रायपुर से अलग होकर नया जिला बना है गरियाबंद। यहां 1561 स्कूलों में से 604 स्कूलों में छात्राओं के लिए शौचालय नहीं है, जबकि 206 स्कूलों में छात्रों के लिए शौचालय नहीं है।

सुनीता की तरह ही 17 वर्षीय राधा (बदला हुआ नाम) की पढ़ाई छूटने की वजह भी स्कूल में शौचालय न होना रहा है। राधा रायपुर के सबसे सघन इलाके



मोदहापारा में रहती है। तीसरी कक्षा उत्तीर्ण करने के बाद उसने कभी मुड़कर स्कूल की तरफ नहीं देखा। ऐसा नहीं है कि वह पढ़ना नहीं चाहती थी या उसके परिजन उसे पढ़ाना नहीं चाहते थे। लेकिन राधा मजबूरी यह थी कि उसके स्कूल में शौच या लघुशंका के लिए कोई सुविधा उपलब्ध नहीं थी। ऐसे में पढ़ाई के दौरान अपने इन प्राकृतिक क्रियाकलापों को निपटाने के लिए उसे दो किलोमीटर दूर स्थित अपने घर का रुख करना पड़ता था। यह ऐसी दिक्कत थी जिसका हल उसकी समझ से यही आया कि वह अपनी पढ़ाई छोड़ दे। उसके मां-बाप को भी यही ठीक लगा। आज तीसरी पास यह लड़की एक दफ्तर में चाय-पानी पिलाने का काम करती है और अपने आसपास पढ़ी लिखी लड़कियों को देखकर अफसोस करती है कि काश वह और आगे पढ़ पाती।

छत्तीसगढ़ में 47 हजार 526 स्कूल हैं। इनमें 17 हजार से ज्यादा स्कूलों में छात्रों और छात्राओं दोनों के लिए शौचालय नहीं हैं।

राधा की कहानी में सबसे बड़ी विंडबना यह है कि वह तो प्रदेश की राजधानी रायपुर में रहती है। तब भी उसे उसके विद्यालय में शौचालय की सुविधा नहीं मिल पाई। इन हालात में उन लड़कियों की मुश्किल तो और भी ज्यादा है जो अल्पसंख्यक समुदाय से आती हैं। राधा की ही सहेली फौजिया (बदला हुआ नाम) (15 वर्ष) की भी यही कहानी है। फौजिया के पिता शेख उस्मान फलों का ठेला लगाते हैं। उस्मान अपनी इकलौती संतान को खूब पढ़ाना चाहते थे ताकि समुदाय में उनका मान सम्मान बढ़ सके। लेकिन शासकीय प्राथमिक शाला, कचना में पढ़ने वाली फौजिया ने पांचवीं के बाद ठीक उसी वजह से पढ़ाई छोड़ी जिस वजह से राधा ने स्कूल जाना बंद किया था। अब फौजिया नमकीन बनाने वाले एक कारखाने में काम करती है।

राधा और फौजिया के साथ ही अकेले रायपुर में हजारों लड़कियां ऐसी हैं जिन्होंने या तो स्कूल छोड़ दिया या फिर पढ़ाई के दौरान उस यातना को भोगने को मजबूर हैं, जिसकी तरफ आजादी के 67 साल बीतने के बाद भी केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों ने गंभीरता से ध्यान नहीं दिया।

केंद्रीय मानव संसाधन मंत्रालय के हालिया सर्वे के मुताबिक अकेले रायपुर के 78 स्कूलों में छात्राओं और 220 स्कूलों में छात्रों के लिए शौचालय की व्यवस्था नहीं है। वहीं राजधानी के 1000 स्कूलों में छात्राओं के 583 और छात्रों के लिए बने 516 शौचालय खराब स्थिति में हैं। इन शौचालयों का इस्तेमाल करना स्वास्थ्य के लिए खतरनाक हो गया है। यह स्थिति तब है जब रायपुर को राजधानी बने 13 साल बीत चुके हैं। मानव संसाधन मंत्रालय का सर्वे यह भी बताता है कि प्रदेश के जिन स्कूलों में छात्राओं के लिए शौचालय बनाया गया था वे रख-रखाव के अभाव में अनुपयोगी हो चुके हैं। इनकी संख्या रायपुर में 583, कांकेर में 156, धमतरी में 150, बेमेतरा में 213, मुंगेली में 149 और बलौदाबाजार में 135, सूरजपुर में 503, बस्तर में 359, सरगुजा में 323, गरियाबंद में 235, कोरबा में 238, कोरिया में 189, जशपुर में 166 है। आदिवासी क्षेत्र के स्कूलों की बात करें तो यहां हालत और भी बुरी है। बस्तर में 738, सूरजपुर में 683, सरगुजा में 560, गरियाबंद में 394, जशपुर में 369, कोरिया में 358 और कांकेर में 323 स्कूलों में शौचालय का



निर्माण तो किया गया था लेकिन अब वे अनुपयोगी हो चुके हैं। इसी पखवाड़े की शुरुआत में राज्य के स्कूल शिक्षा मंत्री केदार कश्यप खुद भी शौचालय विहीन स्कूलों को लेकर चिंता जता चुके हैं। कश्यप ने नए रायपुर स्थित मंत्रालय में आला अफसरों की बैठक बुलाकर उन्हें जल्द से जल्द स्कूलों में शौचालयों के निर्माण के निर्देश दिए हैं। केदार कश्यप तहलका से कहते हैं, 'यह सच है कि कई छात्राओं ने केवल इसी कारण स्कूल जाना छोड़ दिया। लेकिन हम उन लड़कियों के लिए भी किसी ऐसी योजना पर विचार कर रहे हैं, जो उनकी स्कूली पढ़ाई फिर से शुरू करवा सके। 'स्कूली शिक्षा के सचिव सुब्रत साहू का कहना है, 'प्रदेश के सभी स्कूलों में शौचालय की समुचित व्यवस्था की दिशा में काम शुरू कर दिए हैं। आने वाले समय में सभी स्कूलों में इसकी बेहतर व्यवस्था देखने को मिलेगी।'

भले ही स्कूल शिक्षा मंत्री स्कूल छोड़ रही छात्राओं पर दुख जता रहे हैं, लेकिन ऐसा नहीं है कि वे इसे पहले नहीं रोक सकते थे। छत्तीसगढ़ में स्कूल शिक्षा विभाग तीसरा ऐसा विभाग है, जिसका सालाना बजट दूसरे विभागों से कहीं ज्यादा होता है। इसका अंदाजा इसी बात से लगाया जा सकता है कि राज्य निर्माण के वक्त यानि वर्ष 2001-2002 में स्कूल शिक्षा विभाग का बजट केवल 813 करोड़ 58 लाख रुपये था, जो 2013-14 में बढ़कर 6 हजार 298 करोड़ रुपये हो गया है। बजट में जो बिंदु विशेष रूप से उल्लेखित किए गए हैं, उसमें कहीं भी शौचालय निर्माण को शामिल करने की जहमत भी नहीं उठाई गई है। जबकि शालाओं में मूलभूत सुविधाएं उपलब्ध कराने के लिए (जिसमें प्रयोगशाला उपकरण के साथ फर्नीचर खरीदी को भी शामिल किया गया है) 175 करोड़ रुपये का प्रावधान किया गया है। जाहिर है कि मूलभूत सुविधाओं में शौचालय भी आता है, लेकिन इसके निर्माण में राज्य सरकार ने कुछ कम ही दिलचस्पी दिखाई है। छत्तीसगढ़ में लंबे समय से काम कर रहे हैं ऑक्सफैम इंडिया के कार्यक्रम अधिकारी विजेन्द्र अजनबी कहते हैं, 'स्कूलों में आवश्यक सुविधाओं का अभाव लड़कियों में कई बीमारियों को भी जन्म दे रहा है। हमारी टीम के सामने लगातार कई ऐसे मामले आए हैं, जो चिंताजनक हैं।'

अपने निर्माण के 13 साल बाद ही सही इस संवेदनशील मुद्दे पर राज्य सरकार सक्रिय होते दिख रही है। ऐसे में उम्मीद की जा सकती है कि शिक्षा क्षेत्र में काम कर रहे सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं की ही नहीं बल्कि छात्र-छात्राओं से सहित उनके अभिभावकों की भी चिंताएं जल्दी दूर होंगी।



#### PRIYANKA KAUSHAL

Priyanka Kaushal has over ten years of experience in both print and electronic media and among her various Awards is the one "Fearless And Best Journalist In Chhattisgarh" by Rajya Mahila Aayog, Chhattisgarh Government. She has also coauthored a book. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Web E Magazine



## **PUBLIC TRANSPORT BECOMING UNSAFE FOR WOMEN IN J&K**

***Rising Kashmir, October 3, 2013***

*State witnesses surge in harassment of females in buses • 3223 molestation, eve teasing cases registered in 2011, 12; many go unnoticed*

**S**rinagar, Oct 03: Unwelcome physical contacts and advances, words or comments, making females hearing it uncomfortable, jokes and obscene gestures are the common practices used in public transportation of the valley to tease women sexually. These practices have made it too difficult for women especially girls to use different modes of public transport, more so in Valley towns and Srinagar city.

As per the nature of complaints received by various police stations, women in City are continuously subjected to sexually offensive remarks while using various modes of public transport, especially mini buses.

Around 1554 cases of molestation (1194) and eve teasing (350) have been registered under sections 354 and 294 RPC (outraging modesty) in the year 2011. According to 'crime against women' record available with the state police, 1669 cases of molestation (1322) and eve teasing (347) have been registered under sections 354 and 294 RPC (outraging modesty) in 2012 in whole J&K. District Srinagar is leading with 524 complaints for which cases stand registered.

Rising Kashmir interacted with many girls who have suffered 'molestation, eve teasing, sexual harassment' at the hands of drivers, conductors and male passengers. They either complained about the weird behavior of male co-passengers or the conduct of drivers and conductors in the public buses.

Shaheena (name changed), a 17-year-old girl told Rising Kashmir that she boarded a 23 number overcrowded mini bus from Batamaloo to Rambagh. "I was eagerly looking for a seat when the driver acted like a boy scout and created space for me by his side. Feeling appreciative towards the driver I occupied the space but realized soon that his (driver's) act was driven by less noble intentions," she said adding, "He (driver) kept looking at me frequently, but thanks to the woman sitting by me. She was wise enough to understand that I was in a problem. She asked me to fasten my dupatta (scarf) properly. But it was not enough to make the offender stop. He started making indecent remarks at me." Feeling irritated and humiliated Shaheena asked the driver to stop the bus and she chose to get down.

Even though government has ordered reservation of first eight seats for women in all public buses, male passengers hardly follow it. One can find stickers reading 'first 8 seats reserved for women' pasted inside mini buses, but neither drivers nor male passengers pay any heed.

A woman standing in the middle of a crowded bus only invites unwelcome physical contacts and similar advances. Khushboo Shafi, another woman commuter from the city said, "Once I was coming back from my office and had to face a tough time as people refused to obey the seat reservation rule," she said. "It was late in the evening and I had no option but to board a mini-bus which was almost filled with male passengers. The entire scene terrified me a lot," she added.

Many girls complained about misbehavior of bus conductors. They said that besides overloading a bus, the conductors push passengers while collecting fare and if a female objects to it they ask her to get down from the bus and board an auto. Facing molestation in buses, girls said not only drivers and conductors but male passengers and co-passengers make situations intolerable for them by trying to violate the personal space through nudging and touching by their feet, Anjum Afshaan, a college student said. She said it is very hard to travel in mini-buses and other vehicles in the city.

One would either find drivers or conductors passing indecent comments when they see a woman passenger, or male passengers literally leaning towards females. Nadiya Hamid, another victim girl said she faces eve teasing most of the times in public transportation and feels 'unsafe' when such things happen.

"I wonder why there isn't any law against this and if there is then why don't authorities take action against this," she questioned. Women with whom Rising Kashmir talked regarding the issue appealed the government to keep an eye on such incidents so as to protect females especially using public transport. "Government should take the issue to the centre stage," they demanded.



#### **SUMAIYA YOUSUF**

Sumaiya is at present an Education Correspondent with Times Of India, MP. She was earlier working with Rising Kashmir as a Defence and Security correspondent. She refers to herself as an ordinary Kashmiri who has survived 20 years of strife. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best News Report

## ODISHA WOMEN ON A MISSION TO EDUCATE VILLAGERS ON MATERNAL HEALTH, NUTRITION AND SANITATION

*Telecast in NDTV, April 22, 2016*



**G**ouri Majhi of Belgaon village in Odisha's Bolangir district had lost all hope of becoming a mother after multiple miscarriages. Distraught by repeated failures, the 35-year-old and her husband tried everything from prayers to superstitions. But held back by the means and reservations of a poor tribal family, she did not visit a doctor.

"After repeated miscarriages, the villagers started telling me that an evil spirit had cast a spell on me. I offered all kinds of prayers. My family also sacrificed animals. But, I couldn't get the joy of becoming a mother," says Gouri.

When Gouri became pregnant for the sixth time around two years ago, Jogyasini Das, a lady from a neighbouring village, who identified herself as a 'Shakti Varta facilitator', visited her house and conducted meetings on maternal health; emphasizing on the dos and don'ts at the time of pregnancies.

Gouri learnt that a poor diet and physically strenuous work as an agricultural worker could well have been the cause for her miscarriages.

Over the next nine months, she followed up Gouri's case and tried to convince her to consult a doctor and follow his advice. She also spoke to her husband and family members about the importance of proper nutrition and adequate rest during pregnancy. Finally, a year ago Gouri gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

"When Shakti Varta didis conducted meetings in our village, they would explain to all the ladies and me about maternal health, about the right food habits, adequate rest. Initially, I was hesitant to listen to them but decided to take a chance. We followed all their instructions. We now have the most precious gift. It is all thanks to them," says Gokul Majhi, Gouri's husband.

In one of the most ambitious women mobilisation programmes in the country, around 6,000 women are on a mission to educate villagers on maternal health, nutrition and sanitation in 15 districts of Odisha and make a difference. As part of the effort to reduce the high rate of maternal and infant mortality in the state, the Shakti Varta programme, a joint initiative of the departments of Health, Women and Child Development, and Rural Development of Government of Odisha, has spread to 24,000 villages in the state.

Through this initiative, local villagers have been trained to use innovative methods like storytelling and picture cards to engage villagers on issues related to maternal health, nutrition and sanitation. Owing to the success of the programme, the government now plans to introduce it in the remaining 15 districts.

"This is one of the largest women mobilisation programme in the country. We started with 15 high-burden districts in the state. We managed to cover about 2 lakh women self-help groups. We have about 32,600 Shakti Varta points in 24,000 villages. We have 20 meeting cycles spread over a period of one year where we talk about important issues. The results have been very encouraging and we now plan to replicate in the remaining 15 districts," says Bishal Deb, Secretary, Women and Child Development Department, Government of Odisha.



#### **TAZEEN QURESHY**

Currently a Senior Correspondent with KIIT University covering special interviews for them, Tazeen Qureshy earlier worked with NDTV. Travelling across Odisha she has reported on a wide range of topics and contributed for a number of campaigns like Every Life Counts, India matters etc. Many of her stories are archived in the NDTY website. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Feature

# गर्भाशय निकालने का धंधा

**Shashi Kiran Sandesh**

हिस्टेरेक्टोमि आरेशन के बहाने डॉक्टर खुले आम का रहे हैं



देश भर में गरीब और निरक्षर महिलाओं के पेट में हुए दर्द को कभी गर्भाशय में कैंसर बताकर घबराहट को अंडाशय में गंभीर बीमारी का लक्षण बताकर, गर्भाशय, अंडाशय सहित फ़ैलोपियन ट्यूब और सर्विक्स निकाले जाने का धंधा जोर-शोर से चल रहा है। देश भर में डॉक्टर हिस्टेरेक्टोमि (गर्भाशयछेदन) का ये धंधा बेरोकटोक चलाया जा रहा है। चौंकाने वाली बात यह है कि ये क्या अपने फायदे के लिये उन जवान महिलाओं को भी नहीं छोड़ रहे हैं जो जी मिचलाने, पेट में दर्द होने तथा माहवारी के दिनों में अधिक रक्तस्राव की शिकायत लेकर डॉक्टर के पास पहुँच रही हैं।

यह ऑपरेशन मरीज के डॉक्टर के पास पहुँचने के 24 से 48 घंटे के भीतर कर दिया गया। देश भर के आंकड़े यदि एकत्रित किये जाएँ तो ये मामले हजारों में हैं। इनमें कुछ मामले वास्तविक भी हो सकते हैं? लेकिन लगता है कि चंद रूपये का लालच इस कदर लालची बना रहा है कि वे बीमारी न होते हुए भी लोगों को बीमार बता अपने महल खड़े का रहे हैं।

कुछ गैर सरकारी संस्थाओं द्वारा विभिन्न राज्यों में किए गए शोध से पता चला है कि तीन साल के भीतर हर जिले में 25 से 35 वर्ष की हजारों महिलाओं के गर्भाशय निकाल दिये गये हैं। अधिकांश ऑपरेशन बिना बायोप्सी किए कैंसर बता कर कर दिये गये, जबकि सामान्यतरु डॉक्टर ऑपरेशन की सलाह तभी दे सक्ता है जब इलाज के बाकी सारे उपाय नाकाम साबित हो गये हो। ऑक्सफेम संस्था ने २०१० में किए शोध में बताया है कि हिस्टेरेक्टोमि के सबसे बुरे हालात राजस्थान, छत्तीसगढ़, म.प्र. बिहार, आन्ध्रप्रदेश, गुजरात और महाराष्ट्र के बताए थे द रिपोर्ट में यह भी बताया था कि किस तरह डॉक्टर अपनी शक्ति और राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना का गलत उपयोग का रहे हैं।

बड़ी तादाद में महिलाओं के गर्भाशय और अंडाशय के ऑपरेशनों ने बीमा कम्पनियों को भी चिंतित कर दिया। एक बीमा कम्पनी द्वारा किये गये सर्वेक्षण से पता चला है कि पिछले तीन वर्षों में २५-३५ आयु वर्ग की ५०० से अधिक महिलाओं का गर्भाशय और अंडाशय निकाला जा चुका है। इनमें २० प्रतिशत की उम्र तो मात्र २५ से ३५ के बीच थी।

अधिकतर मामलों में डॉक्टरों ने लिखा है कि गर्भाशय में एक छोटा रेशा मिला। इसके अलावा अंडाशय, गर्भाशय के ऑपरेशन की वजह माहवारी के दौरान अत्यधिक रक्तस्राव को भी बताया गया है। बीमा कम्पनी ने इन चिकित्सकों और अस्पतालों को बिना जरूरत के ऑपरेशन करने पर चेतावनी दी है जबकि स्त्री रोग

विशेषज्ञों ने इस ऑपरेशनों को जवान महिलाओं के स्वास्थ्य के लिए खतरनाक बताया है।

राजस्थान में दौसा में सूचना के अधिकार (आरटीआई) के तहत हुए खुलासे से पता चला कि अकेले राजस्थान में अप्रैल से अक्टूबर २०१० के बीच में महज तीन निजी अस्पतालों ने ऐसे ३८५ आपरेशन किए, जिनमें २८६ मामले हिस्टेरेक्टोमि के थे। इनमें से अधिकतर महिलाओं की उम्र ३० से कम थी। सबसे कम उम्र की महिला की आयु महज १८ साल थी। चित्तूर की स्वास्थ्य कार्यकर्ता छाया पचौली बताती है कि स्त्रीरोग विभाग में हिस्टेरेक्टोमि सबसे अधिक किया जाने वाला ऑपरेशन है। पिछले कुछ वर्षों में इस ऑपरेशन में बेतहाशा वृद्धि देखी गई है। पहले ४०-४५ पर महिलाओं का हिस्टेरेक्टोमि किया जाता था लेकिन अब चिकित्सक २५-३० साल की महिलाओं के गर्भाशय और अंडाशय बिना उन्हें पूरी जानकारी दिए कैंसर का भय दिखाकर निकाल रहे हैं। इसकी बहुत बड़ी वजह देशभर में चलाई जा रही है केंद्र सरकार की राष्ट्रीय स्वास्थ्य बीमा योजना है।

छत्तीसगढ़ में महिलाओं के साथ हो रही इस धोखाधड़ी को देखते हुए राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग सामने आया। मीडिया में आई खबरों का संज्ञान लेते हुए राज्य के मुख्य सचिव को नोटिस भेजा था। राज्य में पिछले ढाई वर्षों में इस तरह के ७००० ऑपरेशन किये जाने की सूचना है। ऐसा ही आंकड़ा महाराष्ट्र के लातूर, उस्मनाबाद जैसे नौ जिलों से भी आया है। गैर सरकारी संस्था द्वारा कराये गए। सर्वेक्षण से पता चला है कि सिर्फ नौ जिलों में ६० फीसदी विवाहित महिलाएँ, ५४ फीसदी विधवा महिलाएँ, १.३ फीसदी बेघर महिलाओं की बच्चेदानी निकाली गई है। संस्था की कार्यकर्ता मेघा काले ने आरोप लगाया है कि कुछ ऐसे ही मामले गुजरात और आंध्रप्रदेश से भी सामने आए हैं। गुजरात के अहमदाबाद जिले में सेवा संस्था ने शोध में पाया कि यहां भी हजारों की संख्या में महिलाओं के ऑपरेशन कर गर्भाशय और अंडाशय निकाल दिया गया है।

डॉक्टर की इस साजिश का शिकार न केवल गरीब और अनपढ़ महिलाएँ हुई हैं बल्कि डाक्टरों ने शहरी पढी-लिखी महिलाओं को भी बेवकूफ बना दिया है। सरकार ने बीमा योजना के तहत निजी अस्पतालों में किए जाने वाले 'हिस्टेरेक्टोमि' के ऑपरेशन की मान्यता खत्म कर दिया। छाया बताती है कि इन ऑपरेशन के मामलों में पढ़े लिखे एमबीबीएस डॉक्टर भी झोलाझाप डाक्टरों की तरह की व्यवहार करते हैं।



#### SAROJ SHUKLA

A freelancer, Saroj has been consistently writing on gender issues and has managed to expose the wrongs being perpetrated by various hospitals in the name of hysterectomy. She is also committed to improving the stature of tribal women in Datia district of Madhya Pradesh. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Feature

## **SURROGACY ON THE RISE IN TRIBAL AREAS**

*Deccan Chronicle, April 7, 2016*

**S**urrogate pregnancies are on the rise in tribal areas as the rent-a-womb concept is gathering steam thanks to the poor financial condition of the locals.

Agents are the middlemen between the surrogate mothers and fertility centers. The women are paid from ₹ 1 lakh to ₹ 3 lakh per surrogacy. Agents prefer women who are presentable. The fertility clinics charge from Rs 10 lakh to ₹ 30 lakh from childless couples. There are currently around 100 pregnant surrogates in the city and another 150 are willing to be surrogates. The fertility centers usually take care of the mothers till childbirth but post delivery they are left to fend for themselves.

Women's commission chairperson Tripurarana Venkataratnam, said that surrogate mothers were mostly from rural and tribal areas. "All the districts have surrogate mothers. Tribals from Banjara Tandas and women below poverty line are being attracted by agents for easy money.

Surrogacy has become a commercial activity and women's wombs are being used as a commodity. Women from rural areas do not know about post delivery problems and the agents do not inform them about the risks," she said. She added, "There must be an Act to regulate these commercial activities that are exploiting poor women. Those interested in having babies through surrogacy, let them have it through their relatives," she said.

Responding to the Supreme Court, the Centre on January 10, 2016 had filed an affidavit stating that commercial surrogacy of non-Indian parents hiring a mother in India to get a surrogate child would not be allowed and the scope of surrogacy would be limited to Indian married infertile couples only. The Centre had informed the court that the Assisted Reproductive Techniques (Regulation) Bill to regulate commercial surrogacy along with model guidelines had been sent to the states.

Fertility specialist Dr Roya Rozati from Maternal Health and Research Trust said that Hyderabad had around 25 recognised fertility centres with

sophisticated technology. "Each centre deals with at least three cases per month and roughly 100 surrogacy cases are being reported from the city. We don't have an idea about other fertility centres," she said.

Adding about the care of surrogacy mothers, she said, "We take care of surrogate mothers after delivery too. We provide the required medicines including antibiotics, iron and other nutrition apart from required tests including thyroid etc.," she said.

### **Extreme poverty driving surrogacy in Telangana districts**

A surrogate mother from Warangal district said that her husband had died four year back and she and her three children were facing extreme poverty.

"I know the fourth delivery causes health problems. But this is the only way to earn easy money. Doctors explained about the caesarian birth and I was ready. I have come to Hyderabad through agents and several tests were done at Warangal before reaching here," she said. She added that she was introduced by another surrogate mother at their tanda. "My neighbor was also a surrogate mother and as per her suggestion, I met the agent. As she gave birth to a beautiful baby, the parents are supporting her with monthly maintenance. But the agent told me that it may not possible in all the cases," she explained. A surrogate mother from Karimnagar said that the agents would give ₹25,000 soon after the agreement. "They spend money on medicines once we are admitted in hospital. The remaining amount of Rs 1 lakh to ₹2.5 lakh will be given after delivery of a baby. In most of the cases they do not give money if it's a still-born baby," she said.

### **Risk not known to many women**

Hyderabad: A UN study in July 2012 on the economic scale of surrogacy in India stated that commercial surrogacy was worth more than \$400 million a year with over 3,000 fertility clinics in the country. Dr Manjula Anagani from Maxcure hospital said that the risk would be more for a surrogate mother who had already given birth to two or more babies. "Cesarean is compulsory in surrogacy cases, the surrogate mother may thus suffer from cesarean complications in future apart from anesthesia complications. If the woman has already given birth to one or two children, she may face bleeding, BP and diabetics problems during pregnancy. Indian laws do not allow a woman to be a surrogate more than once," she said.

Chairperson of Women's Commission, Ms Tripuraram Venkataratnam, said that agents of fertility centers were targeting tribals in Devarakonda of Nalgonda district, tribal areas in Warangal, Khammam, Karimnagar, Mahabubnagar, Nizamabad and other districts. "Most of these women don't know about the



risk after delivery. We are holding counseling sessions with the help of NGOs in tribal areas. As there is no Act on regulating fertility centers and surrogacy, except opposing commercial activities, we can't take any action against agents. As the entire process is being done secretly, we do not have accurate statistics of surrogacy cases," she said.



#### **KAMALAPATHI RAO HINDUPURAM**

Kamalapathi Rao began his career as journalist in Eenadu Telugu daily in 1999 and is at present working in Deccan Chronicle. His detailed investigative stories have managed to draw public attention to a number of issues and ensured that justice is done. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16-Best Feature

## **498A AYUDHAM AVUTONDA? IS 498A BECOMING A WEAPON?**

*Talk show on ETV, November 9, 2014*

**S** The talk show Nari Bheri, in the episode titled “498A Ayudham Avutoda?” focuses on the stand taken by the Supreme Court and the orders given by the Central Home Department to all States that they should be cautious in dealing with Dowry harassment cases filed under section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, in light of increasing instances misuse of it's provisions by women to harass the husband and in-laws.

A panel consisting of eminent lawyers, women's rights activists discuss the issue and emphasize the importance of 498A for providing protection and justice the harassment faced by women for dowry. It is argued that the number of cases of mis-use are minuscule compared to the cases that go unreported or that are not taken to their logical conclusion. It is also highlighted that in most cases women retract the cases under pressure from family and society which is not the same as filing a case with malicious intent.



### **PRASANNA RAO KADAMANDLA**

A Senior Reporter with ETV, Prasanna Rao is producer of the programme Nari-Bheri which discusses the various issues faced by women be it relating to education, empowerment, development and also gives solutions. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Talk Show

# Women and Conflict

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Increasingly more and more areas are coming under conflict zones with naxalite activities gaining strength in Central India, apart from the unrest and conflict in the border areas of Kashmir and Northeast. The insurgency, militancy and the caste and communal violence impact women in various ways. So do the natural calamities and hostile environments. While the direct impact on them in terms of loss of dear ones, property, homes and sexual violence that they are subjected to is visible, the impact of violence on their roles as perpetrators as well as peace keepers is often not delved upon in the media. However, it is important that we expand the scope to include all the three engagements of women in conflict

Shazia Yousuf's story covers the life of Tahira from Kashmir whose husband has mysteriously disappeared one day. Her story represents the lives of many half-widows in Kashmir who are forever waiting for their missing husbands, bearing the burden of being single mothers with limited resources and social support

Chetna Verma looks at the fight of women in conflict areas of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand and Ladakh for self dignity, independence and promoting peace in the community. She illustrates how women play a key role as peace keepers actively engaged in bringing in normalcy in the region by citing the examples of the foot ball team from Jharkhand which won the Gasteiz Cup in Spain against all odds, the struggle of the so called "West Pakistan Refugees" - who are denied political rights and citizenship even after six decades of migrating to the country, to eke out a decent living and the fight of Kamla Bai from Chattisgarh for literacy of the girls. In yet another article she highlights the woes of Ladakhi women in Kargil region who face hostile environment with depleting water resources along with the cross border hostilities. She highlight their grit and determination to overcome the hurdles.

Apart from political and armed conflict women also face conflict with extremely adverse natural conditions brought about by climate change and disasters. Displacement and uncertainty are the two major challenges that women face in such contexts. In an insightful article, Parvin Sultana writes about what homelessness means to women living in the Chars of Assam who are constantly faced with the fear of flooding and displacement. She makes a point when she says that displacement hits at the very root of a woman's identity as a homemaker as her life revolves around survival in temporary shelters, leaving little time and scope for making a home.

Reading through these articles will leave you with a sense of admiration for the resilience of women and their often unacknowledged role as peacekeeper.

## THE LONELY AND PAINFUL LIFE OF TAHIRA

*Greater Kashmir, January 8, 2015*

**I**t was the summer of 1990. People talked of war, commotion of bullet marks, and bleeding bodies. That summer Tahira and Tariq fell in love.

Tahira had just finished her high school and joined Mission Hospital in her hometown Baramulla for a diploma in nursing. She didn't want to be a nurse though. All she wanted was an excuse to go out every day and earn a glimpse of Tariq. A handful of crumpled love notes – red in color, messy and smelling of human blood – was enough to steal Tahira's heart.

Tariq was 17, a year older than her, and came from a lower caste background, "we were Khan and they were Rather. It was like oil and water," says Tahira, holding back a smile. The love story of Tariq and Tahira could easily make for a romantic blockbuster. There is a handsome boy, a beautiful girl, their brimming love and rigid parents. However, what makes it different is the pattern. Here, twist follows a happy ending.

Crackdowns became rampant and killings a routine. A small village in Baramulla, where Tariq and Tahira lived, peace and tranquility surrendered before war. People feared death but the couple dreamed of a life together. After numerous fights, arguments, suicide warnings and hunger protests, they were finally married. Tahira wore a pink suit that her mother adorned with gold coins.

For this teenage couple, marriage was all about living happily. The responsibility of earning money and helping to run a house was never thought of. So when Tariq's family teased him for his idleness and the extra mouth he got them to feed, he decided to leave. One morning, without informing anyone, the couple left for Delhi to start their lives afresh.

Delhi, far away from the bombs and bloodshed, felt secure. Tariq first worked as helper at a shop. However, when Tahira found a job in a garment factory, he too joined in. He wanted to stay close to his wife, he told everyone, because she was beautiful, childish and too naïve to understand the world. "If only he could see me today, he would realize what time has taught his wife," Tahira said.

Tahira is certainly a different woman now. She is not the childish and pampered wife of Tariq anymore. She is his half-widow who works at a beauty parlor and feeds her three children. Once naïve, Tahira is now spokesperson for Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), who faces media, collaborates with NGO's and fights for justice.

Tariq has 'disappeared' since December 11 2002, when he left home to sit for a job interview in Delhi. "I will never forgive myself for sending him that day," said Tahira. "I still remember his sad face. He was scared."

Tahira wanted him to sit for the interview so that they could return to the city where they spent blissful years of life. Seven years ago, after their second son was born, they had returned to valley. Tahira regretted it and wanted to go back. On the fateful day, Tariq neatly oiled his hair, donned his favorite jacket and left home hesitantly. As Tahira packed his favorite food and talked about the new job opportunity, Tariq's eyes stayed glued to his children – his three sons sleeping peacefully on a mattress. Mudasir, the eldest child was 9, Ravees 7 and Sahil 2. It was a cold sunless morning when Tariq left, looking back again and again until disappearing in the fog.

That day, Tariq became a number and got added to the list of disappeared people in the valley. Tahira waited for his promised phone call, or his letters he was so fond of writing. Nothing came. Like many men she had heard of, Tahira's husband too disappeared without any trace. The Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), estimates the number of disappeared people as 8,000 plus. The victims have left around 2000 half widows behind.

Tahira filed a missing report in Boniyar police station. She was asked to wait which she couldn't. Every day she left with her three children to search Tariq in military camps, jails and detention centers. One day someone told her about a man named Tariq who was spotted in an Udhampur jail. She rushed there with money, food and his clothes. It turned out to be someone else. "I was going crazy," she said.

When her savings ran out and Tahira failed to pay the monthly fees, Mudasir and Ravees were thrown out of their school. A neighbor who ran a business in Srinagar informed her about APDP. He had seen families of disappeared people protesting in the city center Lal Chowk. Tahira moved to Srinagar in December 2003, rented a room and joined APDP.

Mudasir was put in Rahat Manzil and Ravees in Miskeen Bagh orphanage. Sahil studied at Baitul Hilal orphanage and lived with his mother. Tahira worked at Asiya Memorial Foundation, an employment generating unit opened after

Asiya Jeelani, a young female journalist and human rights activist who was killed in a mine blast. The unit brought destitute women together to share each other's burden of loneliness, find hope in each other's struggle, and make a living by knitting, stitching and embroidering clothes.

At least six times Tahira came in front of running vehicles, breaking her bones. A life away from her village, her husband and two sons took a toll on her mental health. The members of APDP got her treated for depression. Even today, she cannot fall asleep without taking a tranquilizer.

Presently Tahira lives in a rented room in Ellahi Bagh, Soura. Half a dozen donated blankets, few utensils, and a cooking gas stove are all that make her new home. The historic floods that swept across the valley on September 8 last year washed away everything that Tahira had accumulated over the years at her rented room in Jawahar Nagar.

After being rescued with her children, Tahira watched from a neighbor's attic as the waters took away the remaining belongings of her husband, "Pictures of our wedding, few letters he had written to me, his favorite audio cassettes, and clothes. Everything gone," she said.

Though Tahira never considered remarriage, she believes that the society was too late to respond to the needs of half-widows. As the spokesperson for APDP, she knows many half-widows who would have lived better lives if the fatwa for their remarriage had come on time. According to the Fatwa given last year by Islamic scholars, a half-widow can marry if her disappeared husband doesn't return for seven years. "They took too long to say it," she says. "Until then most of them had crossed their marriageable age and they had growing up children."

For young half-widows like Tahira, the journey has been very painful. Fingers are raised on their modesty and conduct. How is it possible to be so young and not to have a man in life? Where from she gets all these clothes? Who is she going to meet? Tahira has heard people raising these questions. Although she has learned to be strong and mind her own business, but other half-widows from far off villages often share their stories of mistrust and humiliation with her. "I tell them if they run out of money, those people will not come to feed their children," she says.

The infamous 2004 sex scandal in which many victims were learned to be from conflict hit families also added to the suspicion. Three years ago, when Mudasir passed his high school and returned from orphanage to live close to his family, he realized how far he had been from them. He became bitter,

quieter and secluded. A year later Ravees too returned home. Unlike his elder brother, he argued with mother, fought with brothers and harmed himself. One day when Tahira saw him taking hurried puffs from a cigarette, she approached him and caressed him until he broke his silence. "Why did I spend my childhood in an orphanage? Was I an orphan? If I am one and my father has died, why do you still search for him?" he asked her.

With her children around, it is difficult not to miss her husband. Mudasir has Tariq's face. Sahil, like him, is a cricket fan. When he bites nails and becomes restless watching the game, Tahira sees Tariq in him. The middle one, Ravees, who remains aloof, reminds Tahira of her husband the most. "When I hear him singing, especially the songs his dad sang to me, I break into pieces," she says.

As her sons grow and begin to make friends and acquaintances, Tahira gets lonelier. When they fight among themselves, she feels weak. When they shout at her, even casually, her heart breaks. "When they were small, I felt very strong," she says. "But as they begin to have their own lives, I feel my loneliness."

Life could perhaps untangle itself if Tahira knows what happened to her husband after he left that morning. Until then, everything will remind her of him, of their love, of the few blessed years of life they lived together.

"It is not death where you mourn and overcome grief. When a loved one is disappeared, you don't want to mourn but hope for his comeback," she says. "It is impossible to start anew without knowing the truth. I feel it is my duty to trace him and I am guilty of not being able to find him so far."

Tahira thinks her husband might be buried in one of the unmarked graves spread across Jammu and Kashmir. Despite repeated pleas, the government has rejected the mass scale DNA testing of unmarked graves. There are more than 2,000 unmarked graves alone in three districts of northern Kashmir, claims JKCCS.

Hope has diminished but not died for her. Even now, an unexpected knock at the door makes her restless. Someone talks about someone spotted at some place and Tahira thinks it is him.



#### **SHAZIA YOUSUF**

A freelance journalist Shazia, focusses on stories about Kashmiri women and their perspective of war through a gendered lens. She writes on issues that otherwise don't make it to the mainstream media. Her work has fetched her a number of Awards and Fellowships. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Consistent Writing On Gender Issues

## WOMEN IN CONFLICT

*Daily Excelsior, February 2, 2014*

**S**truggle, like water, is transformed by its circumstances, but finds its way past the most daunting of obstacles. Gender-based struggles, In India as elsewhere, have had a long and eventful journey over the centuries, more so in a society fighting patriarchy and other societal odds since time immemorial. Stories highlighting the struggles of the great Indian woman attract attention from across the globe because her struggles have been against her own people. The victory of the young football team consisting of eighteen girls from Jharkhand in the prestigious Gasteiz Cup in Spain last year gathered attention not only because the team scored third position but also because they are a group of tribal girls hailing from a particularly 'backward' state. Their struggle too was more against their own people than against their competing team players, right from the time when they applied for birth certificates and were slapped and made to sweep floor by the Federation and local officials who sneered, "Tu kaise jayegi? Kisne bola jaa sakti hai? Wahan bech denge." (How will you go? Who said you can go? They will sell you there.)

Had they not won, their struggle would have received a silent burial, much like the struggles of countless women surviving in the conflict affected regions of our country where the limelight is on the bloodshed alone.

History is witness to how conflict has, directly or indirectly, affected the evolution of women. Be it the conflict that started with the creation of India's borders in 1947 or the violent uprising of the communist supporters to redistribute land to the landless, women in conflict have had their fair share of struggles and achievements. Highlighting their achievements this new year becomes important as they chose to fight, not taking conflict as an excuse to compromise on their freedom. Here are glimpses of these





indomitable women's journeys starting, rather appropriately, from the northernmost Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir...

During the melee of 1947, several thousand families migrated en masse from West Pakistan and are surviving, till date, in most appalling circumstances across the Jammu region under the tag of "West Pakistani Refugees". After more than 65 years of their migration, they are still bereft of the civil and political rights, exacerbating their dismal living conditions. Worst affected are the women who find no place in the demands of their representatives yet when they meet you, their sunshine smiles reflect their strength to fight against all odds. "As a child, I had dreams of becoming a doctor but poor financial conditions and no scope of a scholarship for a West Pakistani Refugee forced me to look out for other options," said Sunita, a student of Class 11, who is the only sibling among five sisters not to drop out of school after Class 10. The others, demoralized seeing no job opportunities for West Pakistani Refugees, walked out of school only to realize too late that it was a bad decision. Born in a family with no grandsons, they were lucky enough to find support from their grandparents to pursue what they loved – from stitching suits to providing beauty services to the villagers, from helping their artisan father in his small business to drawing sketches, these girls have made their house a "happy home" despite their financial constraints. "Whatever little we have learnt is from our mother – Taro Devi. We have had no opportunity to get professional training under various government schemes to hone our skills as we are labelled 'non-state subject'. However, compared to the stories of Partition that our dadi (grandmother) would narrate, we find ourselves in a much better position," said Sunita, who believes that her fight is not to remove the label but to live a dignified life on the land she calls home.

This homeland has seen many wars and many sufferings. More recent is the Kargil War that, in 1999, left thousands of people in Kargil district of Ladakh coping up with the after effects of the war. The only good the war did was to put Kargil squarely on the Indian map in the minds of Indians elsewhere. People now knew where Kargil is and with this came a wave of change in this traditionally conservative society. The change is colorfully reflected on the streets of the Main Bazaar in Kargil town that leaves the visitors in awe. Draped in the traditional *hijaabs* is a stream of young Kargili women heading towards schools and colleges, clearly outnumbering the men.

This change in the young generation is the cumulative effort of the elder women in Kargili society who decided to come together to form women's committees/societies and NGOs in post-war Kargil which aimed at employing women and making them financially secure. Founded in 2009, 'Kargil Town Women Welfare Committee' was one such. The brainchild of twenty four year

old Chanchik town-based Parveen Akhtar hailing from a well-educated family in rural Pashkum, the Committee was started to offer cloistered homemakers and young dropouts wage earning opportunities. Today, their struggle is with their own administration that gives away funds to organizations run by their male counterparts.

“We will not give up easily. This is the fight for our existence and we need to sustain our effort. It took us years to come together; we won’t let our effort die.”

Taking a leaf from the effort of Kargili women is their adivasi counterpart Kamla Bai, a fifty year old woman residing in one of the worst naxal-affected states of our country – Chhattisgarh. Unfortunately an illiterate, Kamla is doing tremendous work in her village, Damkasa, bringing together men and women of her Gond Community to erase disparities among them. Kamla travels around her hamlet with the objective of sharing tales of rich Gond culture highlighting the importance of women in an adivasi community that seems to have lost its way in the years of conflict and underdevelopment. She focuses on girls’ education by influencing the villagers who only allow the male child to be born and educated. “In our time, there were no such differences among men and women. Considered to be gifts of god, all were seen as equal. My heart does not allow me to sit silently seeing the discrimination against women. I will work till my last breath,” are the words of a determined Kamla Bai, displaying rare self-confidence and determination.

Sitting safe in our cloistered metropolitan worlds, we struggle for our survival far removed from the gory realities of Partition or Naxalism. But these are women who live under the constant threat of conflict: the conflict of the past or the ongoing terror. Unaware of when shelling may start from across the border or when the Naxals will barge into their homes and take away the men folk – these women fight not for their mere existence but the development of their entire society. They are the first to stand up and defend our borders. And they are preparing themselves for the challenges that lie ahead. The entire nation owes them a debt; let us salute struggle!



#### **CHETNA VERMA**

Formerly an Assistant editor with Charkha, Chetna is now a freelance journalist. She has worked in conflict ridden areas of J&K, Mizoram, Assam and Meghalaya. Her work focuses on training youth to write about their development issues. She has also written extensively on the problems faced by women in conflict areas. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14- Best Op-Ed

## **HOMEMAKERS WITHOUT A HOME: WOMEN AND DISPLACEMENT IN DHUBRI CHARS**

*www.twocircles.net, April 5, 2015*

**T**he lives of char dwellers are marked by persisting underdevelopment, systemic exclusion, frequent displacement. However its impact is manifold on the lives of women. This brings forth the need to take a gendered look at the process of dispossession. Erosion which has led to a loss of habitat impacts women in multiple ways. People living in these river islands often lose their homes to erosion and forced to move. Home has a different connotation for women. In a society marked by a gendered division of space, home is often attributed as a woman's own personal arena. If spaces are gendered, home is a women's space. The loss of home to the mighty Brahmaputra impacts women in a different way. Women see the destruction of something they build with their hands. This brings a feeling of rootlessness, a sense of losing one's belonging.

Taking a closer look on the lives of women in chars, few important issues come up. A visit to some of the chars that dot the river Brahmaputra on the fringes of Dhubri brings out the hardships that the inhabitants suffer from. Banshipur is a mere 3 km from the town of Dhubri. A permanent char which has not been submerged for the last 15 years, it houses close to 250 families. There is no electricity. The char has only two schools, one primary level and one middle level. The sole mode of communication is by boat. As a result for higher education while the boys can travel to schools in Dhubri, the girls bounded by the limitation of mobility often give up their studies after primary schools.

These families have lost all their land due to erosion. Their lives are marked by frequent displacement. As a result earning a steady livelihood becomes difficult. Hard working people have seen their agricultural land being submerged in floods. Very few people have government jobs. Others devoid of any help from the government for rehabilitation are on their own. Most of the men move to cities like Guwahati looking for jobs. These people often from the cultural stock of Muslims of East Bengal origin are harassed in cities as fresh immigrants from the neighbouring Bangladesh. While the men of the houses are away, the responsibility of looking after the homes fall on the women. Devoid of the opportunity of higher education, women apart from looking after their homes also try to manage an extra income. They make

incense sticks for a neighboring local company in Dhubri. Many women from the Char have also travelled to distant places like Mumbai, Lucknow in search of job. Those who are left back with the responsibility of looking after families, women in the Chars are also vulnerable on a number of other fronts. The Char has no hospital or Primary Health Centre. Any kind of medical emergency needs to be treated at Dhubri hospital. There is a high risk of maternal mortality as travelling during night by a boat is a difficult affair. The Char is just a few kilometers from the Indo-Bangladesh border. This proximity also creates a lot of trouble as the char dwellers are under a constant surveillance of the Border Security Force.

A similar condition was seen in Baladobachar which is just a km away from Phulbari of Meghalaya. This char houses the inhabitants of South Salmara which has been completely lost due to erosion. Living in constant fear of further erosion, the inhabitants live a difficult life.

Houses made of tin despite the heat gives one an idea about the temporary nature of their habitats. Boats carrying people more than its capacity often run the risk of being upturned. While communal harmony prevails in the char, development deficit is the biggest problem for all. Many lament the loss of ancestral land and a touch with kith and kin. Women face similar problems of limited mobility. Basic necessities are missing in these areas. Women are denied higher education as there are no schools in the char.



Women also bear the brunt of being denoted as D voters. People whose citizenship is not confirmed and are suspected as illegal immigrants are often termed as 'D' Voters or Doubtful Voters. Studies show many innocent Muslim men and women have been clubbed as D Voters and put into detention camps. Razia Begum from the village Borpayek II of Nellie is one such woman. Her father Hari Aabdar Munchi was a British employee. While her children are not denoted as D voters, she is denoted as such and not allowed to vote. Many women have been forced to live in detention camps. This has led to breakdown of many families. In another instance, Sazida Khatun, a mother of 5 children including an 8 month old child was declared a foreigner in 2012. She produced her birth certificate and school certificate but was still declared a foreigner. While her family has lived in the same village for four decades, still her citizenship claims were dismissed. She was separated from her breast feeding baby. This issue got highlighted because of the gross violation of human rights that it pertained.

Detention camps are gendered spaces that women have to negotiate on a daily basis. Children are often put into these camps if their mothers are declared as foreigners. Both women and children are then treated like criminals. They are denied basic rights. The inhabitants are left outside the ambit of normal livelihood.

The problem of women in the chars of Dhubri cannot be seen in isolation. While all char dwellers face problems like lack of basic amenities, difficult livelihood, women's condition is worsened because of their gender. Shifting home frequently and forced to migrate often psychologically takes a toll on women. Losing home means losing a sense of belonging for women. Without a home, the identity of the homemaker becomes ambiguous. The responsibility of setting up a new home is also mainly on women. All these deprivation on multiple levels compounds the problem that women in the char areas face.



#### **PARVIN SULTANA**

Parvin Sultana is currently working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science in Pramathesh Barua College, Gauripur. She writes for a number of Assamese and English newspapers and webzines. Her research interest includes gender, minority rights, northeast studies etc. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Web E Magazine

## WATER WOES OF LADAKHI WOMEN

*Daily Excelsior, September 21, 2014*

**I**n the scorching midday heat, Tsewang Ladol steps into the courtyard outside her house and calls out loud to her neighbours, her dusty grey goncha (traditional Buddhist robe) and colourful skiraks tied around her waist flapping in the light breeze. Her voice carries easily across the silence of the mountainous Ladakhi desert, and four elderly women working the fields in the distance look up in acknowledgement. Soon after, they're on their way up to Ladol's house, climbing the rugged path with practiced ease.

With wrinkles lining their weathered faces, these Ladakhi women reflect a charming attitude that compliments the breathtaking landscape of this otherwise arid snow land. In this mute corner of the world, living in a village tucked away on the border of Ladakh's districts of Kargil and Leh, they pose a challenge to the patriarchal Indian society. On their toes all day long, the women work in the fields ensuring food security for their families and, in the process, creating a source of income in the village.

Women in this region spend the entire year with a singular focus on intense hard work. During summer, they struggle against Kargil's cold, parched geography with little vegetative growth, producing just enough for survival during winter. And when everyone is virtually in hibernation during the six months of extreme cold weather, they keep themselves busy with various sources of income generation.

Agriculture essentially provides them with food as well as some extra cash that they use in times of contingency. In addition to the local crops, women cultivate vegetables such as onion, potatoes, peas, cucumber and mustard. Then operating collectively in Self Help Groups, they sell the surplus produce to locals, labourers working on the National Highway and middlemen who further retail it at higher rates in the Kargil market. They also make mustard oil to sell in town. The profit made is deposited in the group's bank account.

This set pattern, however, has steadily become tougher to follow. Reveals Ladol, 35, "Earlier, we would be able to save some money by selling vegetables. But in the last few years, the production has gone down drastically with the

increasing water crisis in our area. We are able to grow only as much as would suffice for our families. Selling vegetables to others isn't an option anymore."

While the absence of a regular source of water for irrigation has been a constant obstacle in this land, with climate change showing its effects, the problem has only escalated. Over the last six decades, there has been a considerable drop in the snowfall in the area. This has directly affected the quantity of natural water resources available for irrigation. Rigzin Dorjay, 65, remembers how as a child, he has seen three to four feet of snowfall that has now dropped to the bare minimum.

Tsering Yangzen of Darchik village, located along the mighty Indus River, hails from a small community that believes it belongs to the 'pure' Aryan race. He firmly believes that the drying up of water resources each year is jeopardising the very future of his people since they depend solely on agriculture for their food security. Tashi Dawa, 67, who is the wife of the village head, agrees with Yangzen's observation. Sharing her worry, she says, "In the last 30 to 40 years, the productive area has reduced from 10 kanals to five (1kanal = 5445 sq ft). We are concerned about how our coming generations are going to manage once these resources dry up completely."

An ancient reservoir has been their only steady source of water supply. Elaborates Ladol, "During the King's rule, our ancestors had constructed a dam to fight our water problems. Pipes connected to the natural spring fill up the dam that acts as a reservoir. This water is directed to every field in the village. The King had decided on the method of taking turns at the irrigation – and till date everyone follows that process. It used to help us avoid the additional strain of walking long distances for water, but that's not the case anymore."

Although the reservoir has been renovated recently by the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, it does take longer to fill up each summer. What this means for the everyday lives of women across the region is an even bigger challenge. A report published in a regional newspaper in July 2014 reported on how many villages in Kargil, particularly in the South region had been badly affected by drought due to insufficient water in the streams. Farmers have lost the produce of an entire season, adversely affecting their already uncertain economic condition.

In village Haniskote, women are struggling to cultivate with less water and, worse, facing the consequences of a poor yield. "The daily grind starts early. Working in the fields for 6-8 hours ensures that we are able to provide food for the family and also keep our SHGs afloat. That simply leaves us with no time for ourselves. We suffer physical strain that affects our health and have

consequently started looking older than we are," says Tsewang Dolkar, 27, wryly, pointing towards the wrinkles on her face.

When there is low yield, women save food for their families and live on leftovers. The strenuous work in the fields, coupled with low nutritional intake, compromises their health severely. Men from the community are either labourers or jobless. Moreover, when faced with a drought-like situation they migrate to Leh town or other areas like Jammu, Srinagar, Himachal Pradesh or Chandigarh (Punjab) in search of work. Women are left behind to deal with all the crippling problems brought on by drought, poor health and extreme weather conditions.

Today, the entire Ladakh province is threatened by unsustainable tourism, overgrazing, indiscriminate resource extraction and increase in infrastructure. The repercussions of climate change are clearly visible as the Indus River, whose main catchment area - about 59,146 sq km - lies in Ladakh, has been adversely affected by the melting of its feeding glacier Naimona'nyi. According to a major study, this important glacier had shrunk by 155m within the 30 year period from 1976 to 2006, at a rate of about five metres per year.

Unfortunately, the coming years are likely to see the crisis intensifying, with increased cases of drought, cloudburst, changing snowfall pattern and unexpected rains in this cold desert. Any mitigation, if at all done, is likely to ignore the effects of this on the health of women who have considerably less access than men to critical information on weather alerts and cropping patterns, affecting their capacity to respond effectively to the vagaries of changing climatic patterns.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established by the United Nations in 1988 to gather data and develop knowledge about climate change, concludes that, 'Climate change impacts will be differently distributed among different regions, generations, age classes, income groups, occupations, and genders'. India's National Action Policy on Climate Change, too, mentions the need to have a gender sensitive approach towards climate change. Whether the women of Kargil, with their sun-kissed faces and tired bodies, will benefit from the policy change remains to be seen.



#### **CHETNA VERMA**

Formerly an Assistant editor with Charkha, Chetna is now a freelance journalist. She has worked in conflict ridden areas of J&K, Mizoram, Assam and Meghalaya. Her work focuses on training youth to write about their development issues. She has also written extensively on the problems faced by women in conflict areas. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Special Award



# Emerging Social Trends

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The selected write-ups in this section look at some interesting subjects and raise some pertinent questions.

Himmat Kataria raises an important question: Why are women the targets of sexist jokes? And, what is the patriarchal mindset that promotes and revels in such humour? Through the opinions and responses of a cross section of people he establishes that such humour is yet another patriarchal instrument to undermine the value of women in society.

Sindhuvasini questions the response to Deepika Padukone's short film "My Choice". She asks: Why are Deepika's personal and professional interests used to divert attention from her message? Why is there so much reaction to a woman expressing her opinion and asserting her right to choose? Sindhuvasini clearly conveys that while everyone has a right to agree or disagree, nobody has a right to cast personal aspersions on women speaking for their rights or choices.

Dr.Syed Mubin Zehra deals with yet another common practice of calling women who have shown extraordinary courage "Mardani". She asks, why do we have to measure the courage and bravery shown by a woman by the standards of men? Using examples of common women who fought against odds at the grassroot level, Mubin argues that the strength and courage of women should be recognized without terming it as Mardani.

Mrinmayee Ranade discusses the emerging trend of husbands assisting in the birthing process which challenges the gender stereotype that birthing is a woman's responsibility alone.

Megha Joshi asks the question, What is Feminism and delves on the concept of feminism as it is understood popularly ie., as male bashing and as an ideological concept which talks of equal opportunities and rights.

Anwasha Banerjee and Vandana Khare discuss the problems faced by single mothers and the implications of the Supreme Court judgement that had allowed them to be the sole guardians of their children.

How difficult it is for women to pursue a sport? Sukhada Tatke documents the stories of Girls from Mumbra, a conservative neighbourhood in the outskirts of Mumbai, who are breaking many a social norm to play football.

The role of journalists as observers, opinion leaders, and as disrupters is most valuable and the articles in this section are bound to set you thinking.

# मर्दानी नहीं नारी

Jansatta, August 31, 2014

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छले दिनों दिल्ली की एक महिला पत्रकार से चर्चा में यह बात उठी कि महिला को मर्दानी कहना कहां तक उचित है। आप किसी मर्द को जनानी कह कर देखिए तब आप को यह पता चल जाएगा कि मर्द को कैसा दर्द होता है। ऐसा ही दर्द हमें भी होता है जब किसी महिला को मर्दानी कहा जाता है। सवाल यह है कि क्या औरत, मर्द बन कर ही अपना अस्तित्व कायम रख सकती है। अगर यह सच होता तो इतिहास की कई बहादुर महिलाओं का तो नाम ही नहीं हो पाता। इस में पैगम्बर साहब के नवासे हजरत इमाम हुसैन के परिवार की वह बहादुर महिलाएं भी शामिल हैं जिन्होंने कर्बला के मैदान में अपना भरा परिवार लुटाने के बावजूद जालिम के दरबार में अपने मनोबल का बेजोड़ प्रदर्शन किया था कि इतिहास उनका नाम सम्मान से लेता है। उस समाज में जहां लड़कियों को जिंदा दफन कर दिया जाता था वहां महिलाएं युद्ध के मैदान में उतरतीं।

ऐसी महिलाएं भी हैं जिन्होंने अपने अपने देश की सरकारों को कुशलता पूर्वक चलाकर इतिहास के पन्नों में अपना नाम सुनहरे शब्दों में अंकित कर दिया। इस में वह महिलाएं भी हैं जिन्होंने पुरुषों की दुनिया में रहते हुए अंतरिक्ष की ऊंची उड़ान भरीं। वे महिलाएं भी हैं जो हिमालय के ऊंचे शिखर को अपने पैरों के नीचे ले आईं। वे महिलाएं भी हैं जो खेल के मैदान में अपने जलवे बिखेरती रहीं। वे महिलाएं भी हैं जो जंगे आजादी में पुरुषों के साथ कंधे से कन्धा मिला कर लड़ीं। राजनीति हो या खेल का मैदान, रोमांच या फिर गगन के सितारों की खोज, साहित्य क्षेत्र हो या फिर युद्ध का मैदान, बड़े युद्धपोत उड़ाना हो या फिर अंतरिक्ष में छलांग लगाने की बात, महिलाओं ने कभी कमजोरी का सबूत नहीं दिया। फिर क्यों नारी को शक्तिशाली मानने के मापदंड के तौर पर मर्दानी शब्द का उपयोग किया जाता है ?

अभी हाल में आई एक फिल्म नाम से ही मर्दानी है। फिल्म को लेकर जिस तरह का प्रचार किया जा रहा है उससे यह लगता है कि इस फिल्म का उद्देश्य लड़कियों को हालात से टकराने की प्रेरणा देना है लेकिन फिल्म का पहला पक्ष ही कमजोर साबित हुआ है। वह इस योग्य नहीं है कि उसे परिवार के साथ देखा जा सके। यानी फिल्म केवल वयस्कों के लिए है क्योंकि विशेष भूमिका निभाने वाली मर्दानी यानी रानी मुखर्जी के संवाद के अलावा फिल्म में हिंसा भी खूब है। इससे पहले 'रिवाल्वर रानी' नाम की एक और फिल्म भी आई थी। इसमें भी औरत को मर्द बनाने के लिए उल्टी सीधी भाषा का प्रयोग करवाया गया था।

हिम्मत और हौसले को महिला या पुरुष के बीच नहीं बांटा जा सकता। हमने तो कई पुरुषों में ऐसी कायरता देखी है कि उनकी मर्दानगी पर शक होने लगता है।

विश्वास न हो तो किसी भी बाजार में, बस या रेल में, सड़क पर, कहीं भी भीड़-भाड़ में पुरुषों को देख लीजिए कि जब कोई अपराध होते देख कैसे चुपचाप आँखें फेर रहे होते हैं। कहीं यह अपराध अगर औरत के साथ हो रहा हो तब तो उनकी मर्दानगी देखने लायक होती है। क्या यही शक्ति है? आश्चर्य होता है कि बहादुरी की सभी उपलब्धियों को केवल पुरुषों के साथ क्यों जोड़ा जाता है।

पिछले दिनों उत्तराखंड की एक महिला जब पानी लेने गई तो उस पर चीते ने हमला कर दिया। उस महिला ने चीते को पछाड़ दिया। हमारे देश में पानी के लिए महिलाओं को दूर दूर तक जाना पड़ता है। हाल ही में हुए एक अध्ययन के मुताबिक ग्रामीण भारत में हर दूसरी महिला पानी लाने के लिए साल भर में एक सौ तिहत्तर किलोमीटर तक का सफर तय करती है। राष्ट्रीय नमूना सर्वेक्षण विभाग के अनुसार यह आंकड़े २००८-०९ की तुलना में पच्चीस किलोमीटर अधिक है। १७३ किलोमीटर का मतलब है दिल्ली से वृंदावन तक की दूरी। इस दूरी में साल भर सिर पर पानी से भरे घड़ों का बोझ कम नहीं होता होगा। इस मुश्किल काम को कोई मर्द करे तो हम इसे जनानी कह सकते हैं। फिर क्यों महिला बहादुरी के लिए मर्दानी जैसे शब्द की जरूरत पड़ती है।

अगर पुरुष बहादुर होते तो अपने समाज की महिलाओं की रक्षा करने में पीछे नहीं रहते मगर हमारे आस पास महिलाओं के खिलाफ बढ़ने वाले अपराधों का ग्राफ यह बताने के लिए काफी है कि पुरुषों में भी बुजदिल लोग होते हैं। महिला की बहादुरी के लिए मर्दानी जैसे शब्द का इस्तेमाल कहीं न कहीं पुरुषों की ही प्रशंसा कही जा सकती है।

दिल्ली से करीब पचास किलोमीटर दूर स्थित हरियाणा का मेवात जिला अति पिछड़ा माना जाता है। यहाँ शिक्षा का कुल औसत केवल ३७.६ प्रतिशत रहा है। यहीं एक महिला सरपंच ने अपने प्रयासों से लड़कियों की शिक्षा को बढ़ावा दिया है। इस के लिए उन्हें पुरुष नहीं बनना पड़ा, औरत रहते हुए ही वह काम कर रही हैं। नीमखेड़ा गांव की यह महिला सरपंच आशुबी खान जब सरपंच बनी तो लोगों ने यही सोचा था कि नाम उनका चलेगा और काम घर के लोग करेंगे पर उन्होंने इस सोच को बदल कर रख दिया। जबकि दिल्ली तक में देखते हैं कि निगम पार्षद की जगह उनके पति का बड़ा सा फोटो हर पोस्टर-बैनर में दिखाई देता है। उनके पति ही आगे आगे दीखते हैं। मगर मेवात की महिला सरपंच ने उस समाज में जहां महिलाओं को अधिक बढ़ावा देने का रिवाज नहीं है अपने लोगों का सोच बदला है।

उन्होंने अपने क्षेत्र में पहली महिला पंचायत के सोच को आगे बढ़ाया। इसके बाद २००५ में नौ वार्ड्स में प्रत्येक में एक महिला सरपंच चुनी गई। ऐसे समाज में जहां पुरुष ही हावी रहे हों बदलाव लाना मुश्किल हो सकता है पर असंभव नहीं। आज मेवात के नौ वार्डों में से छे में महिला सरपंच हैं जो न केवल लड़कियों की शिक्षा को बढ़ावा दे रही हैं बल्कि लड़कियों को पैदा होने से पहले मार देने के रुझान पर रोक लगाने में कामयाब हुई हैं। अब यहाँ पर लड़कों की तुलना में लड़कियों का औसत लगातार बढ़ रहा है। यही वजह है कि २०११ के सरकारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार हरियाणा में मेवात में लड़कियों की दर दुसरे जिलों से अच्छी है। एक

हजार लड़कों पर ६०६ लड़कियां हैं। ऐसा करने के लिए मेवात की महिलाओं को पुरुष नहीं बनना पड़ा है। उन्होंने महिलाओं के अधिकार की लड़ाई महिला होते हुए लड़ी।

इन सभी महिला सरपंचों ने पानी की कमी को लेकर और चालू परियोजनाओं की प्रगति न हो पाने के कारण २००७ में पद छोड़ने का फैसला किया था। उस समय सोनिया गांधी को जब इस बात का पता चला तो तत्कालीन केंद्रीय पंचायती राज मंत्री और राज्य मंत्री आगे आए और उन्हें ऐसा करने से रोका। पानी का टैंकर हर दिन आने लगा।

इसलिए हमारा मानना है कि बहादुरी के लिए पुरुष या महिला होना कोई महत्व नहीं रखता। यह इस पर निर्भर करता है कि किसने अपनी रिवायतों, अपने धार्मिक विश्वासों, अपने संस्कारों, खुद में कितना उतारा है, कौन अवांछित स्थितियों से टकराने में विश्वास रखता है। इसमें महिलाएं भी हो सकती हैं और पुरुष भी। लेकिन जब महिलाएं कोई ऐसा काम करें तो मर्दाना कहा जाता है। क्यों? क्या मर्द बन कर ही महिलाओं के अधिकारों की लड़ाई जीती जा सकती है?

किसी भी धार्मिक ग्रंथ में औरत को मर्द बनाने की वकालत नहीं की गई है। महिला का अपना अलग अस्तित्व है, इस पर किसी प्रकार का समझौता नहीं किया जा सकता। दरअसल, जरूरत पुरुषों को बदलने की है। औरत को औरत ही रहना है, लेकिन पुरुषों को ऐसा आदमी बनाना है जिसे औरतों का सम्मान करना आता हो। तभी वह मर्द कहलाने के योग्य हो सकते हैं।



#### DR SYED MUBIN ZEHRA

Dr Syed Mubin Zehra is a columnist, Author, Historian and Social Analyst. "Sargoshiyan" is her weekly column on gender and social issues, in Urdu Daily Inquilab. Among her various books is the highly acclaimed "Sexual And Gender Representation in Mughal India". She was awarded Sambhavna Puruskar for her work in empowering women. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Article

## નારી વાદ-વિવાદ નહિ પણ વિચાર

Divya Bhaskar, February 9, 2016

તી

જેતરમાં જ ૨૧ જાન્યુઆરીથી ૨૫ જાન્યુઆરી દરમ્યાન જયપુર લીટરેચર ફેસ્ટીવલમાં કી નોટ સ્પીકર વિશ્વ પ્રસિદ્ધ કવિયત્રી અને લેખિકા માર્ગીરેટ એટવુડ કહે છે “ફેમિનિઝમનો ખરો અર્થ જ્યાં સુધી જાણીએ નહિ ત્યાં સુધી હું ફેમીનીસ્ટ હોવાનો દાવો નથી કરતી અથવા મારી જાતને ફેમીનીસ્ટ નથી ગણાવતી. કોઈ સ્ત્રી પુરુષને ધક્કો મારે એ અર્થ હોય તો હું એવી નારીવાદી નથી. જો તમે એમ કહેતા હોય કે સ્ત્રી માણસ પણ છે તો હા હું નારીવાદી છું. આ એક શબ્દ સાથે વ્યક્તિ વ્યક્તિ એ અર્થ અને જોડાણ બદલાય છે. જ્યાં સમાન હક, સમાન તક, સમાન કાયદાની વાત છે ત્યાં મને ગણજો, બાકી સ્ત્રી પુરુષો કરતા ચઢિયાતી જ છે એવું સાબિત કરવામાં હું નથી માનતી.”

વર્ષથી નારીવાદ વિષે લખાતું આવ્યું અને બોલાતું આવ્યું છે. છતાં એમ કહી શકાય કે સૌથી વધુ વપરાતો આ શબ્દ સૌથી વધુ વાર અનર્થ અથવા અન્ય અર્થ સાથે જોડાતો ગયો છે. નારીવાદની પ્રણેતા અને પ્રથમ ફેમીનીસ્ટ મનાતી સિમોન દ બુઆએ ૧૮૪૮માં “ધ સેકન્ડ સેક્સ” પુસ્તકમાં તત્કાલીન નારીવાદ અને અસ્તિત્વવાદ વિષે લખ્યું. પુરુષ સમાજે સ્ત્રીને સમજવાને બદલે “મિસ્ટ્રી” ગણાવી તેને હંમેશા “અન્ય” બનાવી દીધી છે. સિમોન પહેલા ૧૭૮૨માં અંગ્રેજ લેખિકા અને પત્રકાર મેરી વોલ્સ્ટોન ક્રાફ્ટ એ તેમના પુસ્તક “અ વિન્ડીકેશન ઓફ રાઈટ્સ ઓફ વુમન” માં સ્ત્રીની પરવશતા અને પરિસ્થિતિની ચર્ચા કરી તેને અભ્યાસની સમાન તક મળવી જોઈએની હિમાયત કરી. દરેક સમયગાળામાં નારીવાદ વિષે વિચારો અને તેનું લખાણ પ્રકાશિત થયું. સમાજની માનસિકતા બદલવા માટે અને વૈચારિક ક્રાંતિ માટે જે તે સમયના લેખકોએ પોતાનું યોગદાન આપ્યું. ભારતમાં પણ ટાગોર, કામિની રોય જેવા લેખક અને સમાજ સુધારકોએ આપણી સામાજિક પરિસ્થિતિને અનુલક્ષીને ફેમીનીઝમનો ખ્યાલ સ્પષ્ટ કર્યો. તે છતાં હજી આજે પણ ફેમીનીઝમ સાથે પુરુષના નાકના ટીચકા ચઢે છે અને સ્ત્રીનું મગજ સાતમે આસમાને પહોચે છે.

ફેમિનિઝમ નામનો આ શબ્દ અને વિચાર માત્ર વિરોધ પ્રદર્શિત કરવા માટે વપરાતો ગયો. સમાજમાં સ્ત્રીને સહન કરવી પડતી દરેક મુસીબતની જડ માત્ર પુરુષ જ હોય તેમ પુરુષનો વિરોધ કરવો અથવા તે કરે તે બધું જ કરવાનો પ્રયત્ન કરવો, જ્યાં અને જ્યારે જે કામ માટે કે જે વિચાર માટે સામે પક્ષે “ના” આવે તેને તો ખાસ કરવી. ઘટનાનું મૂળ જાણ્યાં વગર જ્યારે કોઈ પણ સ્ત્રીને સામાજિક સમસ્યા નડે ત્યારે “હમારી માંગે પૂરી કરો” ની જેમ ધરણા કરવા કે દરેક પ્રતિકુળ પરિસ્થિતિને શોષણનું નામ આપવું એ નારીવાદ નથી જ. સ્ત્રીત્વ એ જંડા ફરકાવીને કે વિરોધ પ્રદર્શન કરીને સાબિત કરવાની વસ્તુ કે વિચાર નથી. ખરેખર તો એ લખવાનો વિષય રાખવો પડે છે એ જ પીડા છે. એક સ્ત્રીને માણસ સમજવું. સામાજિક અને બૌદ્ધિક સ્તરે એકસરખું માનવું એ ફેમિનિઝમની મુખ્ય વ્યાખ્યામાં આવી શકે. દરેક સ્ત્રીને સમાન સામાજિક હક મળે તે મુખ્ય હેતુ છે.

હજી મેટરનીટીલીવ માટે કે બાળકને ફીડીંગ આપવા બાબતે પણ સ્ત્રી એ અવરોધનો સામનો કરવો પડે છે. હજી આજે પણ એણે સેકન્ડ જેન્ડર હોવાને કારણે સમાજમાં એક

પગથીયે નીચે ઉભા રહેવું પડે. એ સ્ત્રી છે આથી તેને સમજણ ના પડે કે અગત્યના નિર્ણયમાં એને બોલવાની તક ના મળે. એને” બૈરું “કહીને બેસાડી દેવામાં આવે ત્યારે મક્કમ રહીને વિરોધ કરવો પડે. વૈચારિક અને બૌદ્ધિક સ્વતંત્રતા જાતે લેતા શીખવું પડે. પોતાના જ ઘરના પુરુષોની બીક રાખીને સહેમીને અજંપા કે રોષ સાથે જીવવાનો અર્થ નથી. પુરુષ માટે ગણાતા વ્યવસાયમાં દાખલ થવું કે બળાત્કારનો ભોગ બનેલી પીડિતા માટે ભાષણ ઠોકવાને બદલે પોતાના જ વાતાવરણમાં હાવભાવ, વર્તન, ભાષા દ્વારા પુરેપૂરા આત્મવિશ્વાસ સાથે પોતાનો વિચાર કહેવો, વહેતો કરવો અને તેનું અમલીકરણ કરો તો નારીનો વાદ કે વિવાદ નહિ નારીચેતનાના પાયા નપાઈ શકે.

ફેમિનિઝમ એટલે કે નારીવાદની તરફેણ અને વકીલાત કરવાને બદલે તે માટે વિવાદ કરવાને બદલે નારીચેતનાની વાત થાય તે જરૂરી છે.



#### MEGHA JOSHI

Megha Joshi is a practicing psychologist and writer. Through her columns, Wumanology in weekly woman magazine Madhurima, Divyabhaskar and MANOGRAM in the Daily newspaper Sardargurjari, she provides a rare and easy to understand insight in psychological and philosophical issues. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16- Best Feature

## વ્યંગબાણની મારી : નારી

Abhiyaan, March 14, 2015



ક જોકે એવો વાંચ્યો કે, 'રેપ ઇઝ નોટ એ ક્રાઇમ, ઇટ્સ એ સરપ્રાઇઝ સેક્સ.' આ મેસેજને વાંચ્યા પછી વિચાર થાય કે, કોઈ ઘટના કોઈના માટે આત્મહત્યા કરવા સુધીનું કારણ બની શકે એ બીજા માટે માત્ર એક રમૂજી ટુચકાનો વિષય કેવી રીતે હોઈ શકે. કયા કારણો છે કે, આવા ટુચકાને લોકો ફોરવર્ડ કરતા પહેલાં તેની અંદર સમાયેલી ગંભીર સામગ્રીને લઈને ચિંતિત નથી બનતા. ગુસ્સે કેમ નથી થતા.

ફિલ્મી પડદો હોય, સોશિયલ મીડિયા હોય કે પછી નાટક-મનોરંજનનું મંચ હોય; મહિલાઓને એક રમૂજનું માધ્યમ બનાવવામાં આવી રહ્યું છે. મહિલાઓના વિષયોને લઈ મજાક ઉડાડી તાળીઓ પડાવવામાં આવતી હોય છે. મહિલા દિવસની ઉજવણી કરવા માટે અનેક ઝાકળઝમાળ ભર્યા કાર્યક્રમો કરવામાં આવે છે ત્યારે મહિલાઓને મજાક માટે ટાર્ગેટ બનાવવી કેટલે અંશે યોગ્ય છે? આ પ્રશ્નનો જવાબ મેળવવા 'અભિયાન' સમાજના પ્રબુદ્ધ વ્યક્તિ, સમાજશાસ્ત્રી અને આવી મજાક કરવાનો જેમની ઉપર આરોપ છે એવા હાસ્યકલાકારોને મળ્યું. આ રહ્યો તેનો અહેવાલ

પુરુષ પ્રધાન સમાજની માનસિકતા છે કે, સમાજની ચતુરતામાં મહિલા ઘણી પાછળ છે, પણ આજના જમાનામાં વિવિધ ક્ષેત્રે ઊંચા હોદ્દા પર બેસીને મહિલાએ સાબિત કરી દીધું છે કે, તક નહીં મળવાના કારણે એવી સ્થિતિનું નિર્માણ થયું હતું. જેને અવસર મળે છે એ પોતાની મેળે ક્ષમતા વિકસિત કરી લે છે. પુરુષમાં પણ એવું જ છે. જેને અવસર નથી મળતો તે પાછળ રહી જાય છે. મહિલાઓને અવસર ઓછા મળ્યા એટલે વધુ પાછળ રહી ગઈ. દરેક પુરુષ આઈન્સ્ટાઇન ન થઈ શકે, દરેક આદમી દારાસિંગ ન થઈ શકે, દરેક આદમી એમએફ હુસૈન ન થઈ શકે. એવી જ રીતે દરેક મહિલા દરેક કૌશલ્યમાં નિપુણ હોય એવી આશા રાખવી અસ્થાને છે. સૃષ્ટિના સર્જનહાર બ્રહ્મા પછી સર્જન કરવાની ક્ષમતા કુદરતે સ્ત્રીમાં જ મૂકી છે. મહિલા પણ ઘારે તો આ મુદ્દે પુરુષની મજાક ઉડાવી શકે છે. એમ કહીને કે પુરુષની મદદ વગર પણ ટેસ્ટટ્યુબમાં ભૂણ લઈને સ્ત્રી સંતાન પેદા કરી શકે છે, પણ સ્ત્રી વગર પુરુષ કેવી રીતે સંતાન પેદા કરશે. આ રીતે સ્ત્રી વર્ગ પુરુષને નકામો કહી શકે તેમ છે. આઈઆઈએમ-અમદાવાદના પ્રોફેસર અનિલ ગુપ્તા કહે છે, 'સ્વાભિમાનની સાથે સન્માન મળે તો સમાજ આગળ વધે છે. મહિલાને મજાકનો વિષય બનાવીને સમાજ મહિલાને સન્માન આપવામાં કંજૂસાઈ બતાવી રહ્યો છે. કદાચ મહિલા આજે દરેક ક્ષેત્રમાં આગળ આવી રહી છે. એટલે તેની સાથે હરીફાઈમાં ઊંડા રવાના કરી કોઈ મોકો નહીં મળતો હોવાથી તે મજાક કરીને મુકાબલો કરે છે.'

મહિલાનું ભોળપણ, જલ્દી વિશ્વાસ કરી લેવાની સ્ત્રીની નિર્મળતાને પુરુષ નિર્બળતામાં કે મહિલાની ઓછી ક્ષમતામાં ખપાવે છે.

મહિલાઓના વિશ્વાસનું સન્માન થયું હોય એવા કિસ્સા બહુ ઓછા બને છે. એટલે જ કદાચ મહિલા કમ્પોર પડી અને તેને વ્યંગનો વિષય બનાવી દેવાઈ. અનિલ

ગુપ્તા કહે છે, ‘મહિલાને વ્યંગનો વિષય બનાવવામાં પુરુષની દરિદ્રતા અને વિશ્વાસ નહીં કરવાની ઊણપ છતી થાય છે. સ્ત્રી કમબોર છે એટલા માટે પુરુષ સ્ત્રીને કમબોર નથી આંકતો, પરંતુ પુરુષમાં સ્ત્રી પર વિશ્વાસ કરવાની ક્ષમતા નથી એટલા માટે કમબોર આંકે છે. પુરુષ સ્ત્રીની ક્ષમતા પર વિશ્વાસ કરે તો તેનાથી સ્ત્રીનું સન્માન અને આત્મસન્માન બંનેમાં વધારો થશે.’

સ્ત્રી સમર્થ સિદ્ધ થઈ તો તેને નસીબ જોગ ગણાવીને અને પુરુષની પોતાની સફળતાને બુદ્ધિની દેન સ્વરૂપ ગણાવવાની પ્રવૃત્તિ ખોટી છે. મહિલા પર વ્યંગ કરવાની વૃત્તિ પુરુષની સ્ત્રી સન્માન નહીં કરવાની વૃત્તિ દર્શાવે છે જે વાસ્તવમાં તો પુરુષનો બહુ વિકાસ નથી થયો તે દર્શાવે છે. એ દર્શાવે છે કે, પુરુષ પોતાનામાં એટલી વિશાળતા નથી લાવી શક્યો કે જેમાં સ્ત્રીને ક્ષમા, વિશ્વાસ અને બરાબરીનો દરજ્જો આપવાની હિંમત હોય. કમબોર લોકો બીજા ઉપર વધુ વ્યંગ કરે છે, કટાક્ષ કરે છે. અનિલ ગુપ્તા કહે છે, ‘જે પુરુષ પોતાનું મનોરંજન છીછરી વાતોથી કરે તો તેની માનસિકતા ઉત્કૃષ્ટ દરજ્જાની કેવી રીતે ગણી શકાય? આજે સમાજમાં મહિલાની સુરક્ષાનો વિષય છે તે ક્યાંક ને ક્યાંક વાસ્તવમાં મહિલાની કમબોરીનો ફાયદો ઉઠાવવાની પુરુષ વૃત્તિ બતાવી રહ્યો છે. મહિલા પર વ્યંગ સામાજિક રીતે સ્ત્રી શોષણનો ‘સભ્ય’ માર્ગ છે.’

ભૌતિક શોષણ કે ભાષાના સ્વરૂપમાં વ્યાભિચારમય શોષણ કરો તેના દ્વારા કોઈને નીચલી પાયરીનું બતાવવું, તેની ક્ષમતાઓને ઓછી આંકવી એ તમારી પોતાની ખામી બતાવે છે. કેમ કે તમે તેની ક્ષમતાઓને ઓળખી નથી શકતા. અનિલ ગુપ્તા કહે છે, ‘આપણી કામના પ્રમાણે, મહિલા પણ પુરુષની જેમ ચાલાક, ચતુર અને શોષણવાળી બની જાય એ કંઈ સારી વાત નથી. સ્ત્રીના સમાજ સામે પ્રગટ થતાં માર્મિક પાસાંને વ્યંગમય બનાવવું, છીછરું બનાવવું, મને નથી લાગતું કે, આવી પ્રવૃત્તિથી આપણે સ્ત્રી સમાનતાની દિશામાં આગળ ગતિ કરી શકીશું. આવા વ્યંગથી આપણે મહિલાઓ ઉપર સદીઓથી થઈ રહેલા ઘાવને રુઝવવાને બદલે તાજા કરી રહ્યા છીએ.’

હાલમાં ટીવી ચેનલ્સના કોમેડી કાર્યક્રમોમાં સ્ત્રી પર વ્યંગનું એક નવું સ્વરૂપ પ્રગટ્યું છે. જેમાં પુરુષ સ્ત્રીનાં કપડાં પહેરીને બહુ જ બેહૂદી હરકતો કરે છે અને માત્ર એ બીભત્સ હરકતો ને જોઈને જ દર્શકોને રમજ થાય છે. ઉદાહરણથી જોઈએ તો બહુ જાણીતા થયેલા કાર્યક્રમ ‘કોમેડી નાઇટ્સ વિથ કપિલ’માં કપિલ શર્મા દર્શકોને હસાવવા તેની પત્નીને અપમાનિત કરવાનો એક પણ મોકો ચૂકતો નથી. તેનાં શારિરિક અંગો ઉપર અભદ્ર ટિપ્પણીઓ કરે છે. વડીલોની સાથે બાળકો પણ આ કાર્યક્રમ જુએ છે અને સ્ત્રી સાથે કેવો વ્યવહાર કરવો તે શીખે છે. અનિલ ગુપ્તા કહે છે, ‘કદાચ આ પોર્નોગ્રાફી જોવા માંગતા વર્ગની પિપાસા શાંત કરવાની વૃત્તિ બતાવે છે. રસશાસ્ત્રમાં અલગ અલગ નવ રસનું વર્ણન કરવામાં આવ્યું છે. તેમાં એક રસ બીભત્સ રસ છે અને એ રાક્ષસી ગુણ છે, માનવીય ગુણ નથી. બીભત્સ વ્યંગ માનવની રાક્ષસી વૃત્તિને પ્રોત્સાહન પૂરું પાડે છે. સૌન્દર્ય રસ છે, વીર રસ છે, કરુણા રસ છે... એવામાં કોઈ કારણ નથી કે તમે બીભત્સ રસથી મનોરંજન મેળવો.’

પુરુષો આ પ્રવૃત્તિ કરે છે એ દુઃખની વાત તો છે જ, પણ મહિલાઓ પણ તેને પુરુષનો અધિકાર ગણીને સ્વીકૃતિ આપે છે તે વધુ દુઃખની વાત છે. તેનાથી આવી પ્રવૃત્તિઓને વેગ મળે છે. પ્રોફેસર ગુપ્તા કહે છે કે, ‘જે મહિલાઓ આવા વ્યંગને



જોવાનું બંધ કરી દે તો તેના અડધા દર્શકો તો આપોઆપ ઓછા થઈ જાય, પણ આવી રમૂજ થકી પુરુષ ઘરમાં મહિલાને બતાવી રહ્યો છે કે જો, તારું સ્થાન અહીં છે. આવા વ્યંગ ઘરોની અંદરના અસંતુલન ઉપર વાજબીપણાની મહોર મારવાનું કામ કરે છે. ઘરોમાં પુરુષ પ્રધાનતા જળવાઈ રહે તે માટે આવા કાર્યક્રમો જરૂરી છે અને આ એની જ તો રાજનીતિ છે. જો તેમાં સ્ત્રીની બુદ્ધિમતા, ચતુરાઈ બતાવવામાં આવે તો પછી પુરુષ રોક કેવી રીતે જમાવશે, પાણીનો ગ્લાસ લાવવાનો, ચા બનાવી લાવવાનો ઓર્ડર કેવી રીતે કરી શકશે.’

વળી ઉચ્ચ કોટીનું હાસ્ય નિખળવવા માટે કલમ દ્વારા ઉચ્ચ કોટીનું સર્જન કરવું પડે. મહિલા ઉપર વ્યંગ કરવા માટે કલમ ચલાવવામાં કોઈ સર્જનતાત્મકતાની જરૂર પડતી નથી. આમ આજસુ સમાજના આજસુ પુરુષનું સૌથી મોટું હથિયાર છે સ્ત્રી પર વ્યંગ.

કોમેડી સર્કસ અને લાફ્ટર ચેલેન્જ જેવા કાર્યક્રમોમાં ટુચકાઓના નામે નારી અસ્મિતાને તાર તાર કરવામાં આવે છે. મહિલાના વેશમાં ટુચકા સંભળાવતા પુરુષોને ગમે તે હદની અસ્વીલ વાત અને હરકત કરવાની છૂટ મળી જાય છે. પારિવારિક કાર્યક્રમોના નામે ટીવી ચેનલો પર પ્રાથમ ટાઇમમાં આ બંધાનું પ્રદર્શન થાય છે. આવા વાહિયાત ટુચકા અને અસ્વીલ હરકતો જોઈ-સાંભળીને આપણી અંદર ફિટકાર નથી વરસતો. આપણું ધ્યાન એ વાત પર કેમ નથી જતું કે કેટલાક રમૂજભર્યા ટુચકા કે વાક્યો આપણને ગલીપચી કરાવી જાય છે. તેની પાછળ સમાજના કોઈ વર્ગ માટે ઘૃણા કે ઉપહાસ છુપાયેલો હોય છે.

માઘકાના પ્રોફેસર પ્રવીણ મિશ્રા એક અનુભવ ટાંકતા કહે છે, ‘૨૦૦૨માં આચાર્ય ઇર્મેન્દ્રના વડોદરામાં ભાષણો વખતે હું ત્યાં હાજર હતો. એ ભાષણમાં આચાર્ય સોનિયા ગાંધીને ભાભીજી કહેતા હતા. ભાભીજી શબ્દ ઉપર એવી રીતે પ્રયત્નપૂર્વક ભાર

મૂકતા હતા કે, શ્રોતાગણને સ્પષ્ટ સમજાય કે આ શબ્દ તેને અપમાનિત કરવા માટે વપરાઈ રહ્યો છે. રાજકીય પ્રદર્શનોમાં નેતાઓને હાથમાં બંગડીઓ પહેરવામાં આવે છે તે વાસ્તવમાં શું બતાવે છે? તે બતાવે છે કે, નેતા નક્કામો થઈ ગયો છે. પાલિકા પ્રમુખને, ડીનને, પ્રિન્સિપાલને બંગડી પહેરાવવાના કાર્યક્રમ વાસ્તવમાં મહિલાઓની ક્ષમતા ઉપરનો ફૂર કટાક્ષ છે અને એ કેટલી કમનસીબ બાબત ગણવી કે તેમાં અજાણપણે મહિલાઓ જે બંગડી પહેરાવવાના કૃત્યમાં સામેલ થાય છે. બંગડી પહેરાવવી મતલબ કે તું નામર્દ છે. અને નામર્દ એટલે કોણ? તો બંગડીઓના પ્રતીકથી કહે છે કે, નામર્દ એટલે મહિલા. મતલબ કે મહિલા હોવું એ એક પૂર્ણ પાત્રતા નથી, એટલે કે તેમાં મર્દપણું ખૂટે છે. નેતાને બંગડી પહેરાવીને તમે તેનો અનાદર કરવા માંગો છો તો તમારી માતા, બહેન બંગડીઓ પહેરે છે તેમની પ્રત્યેના આદરનું શું?’

બીજી મહત્ત્વની બાબત દાખલાથી સમજીએ. જેમ કે વિવેકાનંદ, મહાત્મા ગાંધી વગેરે એક સામાન્ય માણસ હતા, પણ પછીથી દીવાલો પર તેમના ફોટા ટાંગીને, તેમની મોટી મૂર્તિઓ સ્થાપિત કરીને વિવેકાનંદપણાને, ગાંધીપણાને પામી ન શકાય એટલા ઊંચા દરજ્જાના બનાવી દેવાય છે. તેમની પૂજા, પ્રાર્થનાઓ શરૂ થઈ જાય છે. એ માનવ નથી, પણ મહામાનવ છે એ વાતને પ્રસ્થાપિત કરતી વાર્તાઓ પણ નીકળે છે. પ્રોફેસર પ્રવીણ મિશ્રા કહે છે, ‘બિલકુલ આવું જ સમગ્ર મહિલા જાતિ ઉપર કરવામાં આવ્યું છે. મહિલાને બહેન નહીં, પણ દેવી બનાવી દેવામાં આવે છે. સરસ્વતી વિદ્યાની માતા છે,

લક્ષ્મી ઘનની માતા છે. આ માતાઓ દેવી છે. આપણે ત્યાં એક વર્ગ અબળા નારીનો છે અને બીજો વર્ગ જેને આચરણમાં ઉતારી ન શકાય તેવી દેવી માતાઓનો છે. પુરુષ સમોવડી મહિલા નથી મળતી. અહીં દેવી અને મહિલા વચ્ચેનું અંતર પ્રચલ્નપૂર્વક ઘણું વધારી દેવામાં આવે છે. મહિલાને એક સમકક્ષ માનવ તરીકે આદર મળતો નથી. કેટલીક મહિલાને દેવી બનાવી દેવામાં આવે છે. એટલે બાકીની મહિલા અબળા આપોઆપ પગતળે આવી જાય છે. આ ગોપ પુરાણ તો મહિલા વ્યંગનું સાધન ન બને.’

બોલીવૂડની ફિલ્મો, ફિલ્મી ગીતો પણ મહિલાને વ્યંગનો વિષય બનાવ્યા સિવાય શું કરે છે? ફિલ્મોમાં છોકરો(ઠીરો) છોકરી(ઠીરોઇન)ને છેડે છે અને એ જ બચાવે છે, પણ તેને છેડવાનો અધિકાર છે. ગીતોમાં છોકરીને પહેલા છેડે છે, છોકરી પ્રતિકાર કરે છે અને અંતમાં છેડખાનીને માન્યતા આપી દે છે.

કોઈ એવો પણ તર્ક રજૂ કરશે કે તો પછી ભયાનક અભાવોમાંથી પસાર થતો માણસ એક નાનકડી ખુશીની શોધ માટે શું કરે અને કોઈ પ્રસંગ તેને હળવાશ આપતો હોય તો તે તેને બીજા કે ત્રીજા સ્વરૂપે જોવાની શું જરૂરત. અહીં જ આપણી ચૂક થાય છે કે એની પછવાડેનાં અત્યાચાર, શોષણ, જુલમ, સામાજિક ભેદ, દમન જેવી વસ્તુઓની ભેળસેળનું બહુ પાતળું પડળ તૈયાર કરવામાં આવે છે. જોવા-સાંભળવામાં સુખ આપતા ઘણા ટુચકાઓ કોના-કોના માટે અપમાન કે દુઃખની પીડા પેદા કરી જાય છે, શું એના ઉપર ક્યારેય ધ્યાન આપ્યું છે. એકદમ ઝીણા શબ્દસૂત્રોને તૈયાર કરીને તેને લોકપ્રિય કરીને વ્યવસ્થાનું અંગ બનાવી દેવાયું છે કે ઘણી વાર પીડિત પણ તેનો ઉપયોગ કરીને આગળ નીકળી જાય છે અને તેને ખબર પણ નથી પડતી કે તેણે પોતાની સાથે એ સુખદ લાગતા બીભત્સ દુઃખને નિયતિમાં બદલી નાખવામાં એક વધુ ઘડકો આપી દીધો છે.

જનસામાન્યની વાત જવા દઈએ, પ્રબુદ્ધ નાગરિકની કક્ષામાં આવતા સાહિત્યકારો પણ ક્યારેક મહિલાને મજાકનો વિષય બનાવી દે છે. હાસ્યકાર બધિર અમદાવાદી કહે છે કે, ‘અમે બધા’ પુસ્તકમાં જ્યોતિન્દ્ર દવેએ એક પાત્રના મોઢે એવું બોલાવડાવ્યું છે કે, ‘મહિલામાં બુદ્ધિ હોત તો પુરુષોને જીવવાનું ભારે પડી ગયું હોત.’ આમાંથી વાચક તરીકે આપણે નિહિત અર્થ એવો તારવવો રહ્યો કે, મોટા ભાગની પુરુષ પ્રવૃત્તિ સ્ત્રીને લાગણીથી ભોળવીને ક્યારેક જરૂર પડે તો નાની-મોટી વાતે ખોટું બોલીને છેતરવાની હોય છે. પતિ-પત્નીના રોજિંદા જીવનમાં પણ સ્ત્રીને ભોળવાની આ પ્રવૃત્તિ ચાલે જ છે ને. મારા મતે પતિ-પત્નીના જોકમાં હજુ મર્યાદિત સુખ લેતાં હોય તો તે ક્ષમ્ય છે, પણ ‘સ્ત્રીની બુદ્ધિ પગની પાનીએ’ જેવા મતલબની વાતો કરીને આખી સ્ત્રી જાતિને નીચી દેખાડે એ વાંધાજનક છે. જેમ કે કોમેડી નાઇટ વિથ કપિલ કાર્યક્રમમાં પતિ-પત્ની બંને વચ્ચે સતત ચક્રમક ઝગા કરે એવું પાત્રાલેખન કરવામાં આવ્યું છે તે ઠીક છે, પણ તેમાં જે પ્રકારે કોમેડો થાય છે તે બિલકુલ અભદ્ર છે. એમાંય ખાસ કરીને પુરુષ પાસે સ્ત્રીના પાત્રની ભજવણી કરાવવામાં આવે છે તે સ્ત્રી જાતિનું અપમાન છે. કપિલ ઘારે તો સ્વસ્થ કોમેડી કરી શકે તેમ છે. તેની પાસે વિચાર છે, આવડત છે.’

ઐતિહાસિક રીતે જોઈએ તો મહિલા કોણ છે અને કેવી છે તેના વિશે મોટા ભાગે પુરુષોએ લખ્યું છે. તેની સુંદરતાની, તેની બુદ્ધિની, તેની ભૂમિકા કે તેની ફરજની વાત પુરુષોએ જ કરી છે. સ્ત્રી પાસે તેનો અધિકાર નહોતો. સ્ત્રી પાસે શિક્ષણ મોડું આવ્યું. સ્ત્રી વિશેના મોટા ભાગના ખયાલો પુરુષોએ ઉપજાવી કાઢેલા અથવા પોતાના

દૃષ્ટિકોણથી ઉપજાવી કાઢેલા છે. એટલે પુરુષ કેન્દ્રિત છે. એટલે જ શૃંગારનાં, દુઃખનાં, હાસ્યનાં સાહિત્યમાં પુરુષોનો પ્રભાવ છે. સમાજશાસ્ત્રી ગૌરાંગ જાની કહે છે, ‘પુરુષ સ્ત્રીને મોટા ભાગે સાધન તરીકે જુએ છે. એટલે રમૂજ માટેનું સાધન પણ એમને બનાવવામાં આવ્યું છે. ઓડિયન્સ પણ પુરુષ છે. એટલે વધુ તાળીઓ પડે છે. મહિલાને હાસ્યમાં લઈને તેની બુદ્ધિ, કુશળતાને ટાર્ગેટ કરવામાં આવે છે. સ્ત્રી અંગેની સુંદરતાની પુરુષની કલ્પનામાં થોડું પણ આડાઅવળું થાય એટલે સ્ત્રીનું શરીર પણ હાસ્યનો વિષય બની જાય છે.’

ફિલ્મોમાં પણ હાસ્ય ઉત્પન્ન કરવા માટે જાડી સ્ત્રી બતાવવામાં આવે છે. કોમેડી કાર્યક્રમોમાં સ્ત્રીનાં કપડાં પહેરીને આવતો પુરુષ કશું ન કરે તો પણ કેમ તે હાસ્યનો વિષય બની જાય છે. કેમ કે એ સ્ત્રી બનવાની સાથે જ આપોઆપ હાસ્યનો વિષય બની જાય છે. એનો અર્થ એ થાય છે કે, સ્ત્રીને ડોક્ટર, તરીકે, ઇજનેર તરીકે, પાઇલટ તરીકે, કાબેલ મહિલા તરીકે જોવા તમે તૈયાર નથી. કાં તો તમે સ્ત્રીને રોતી બતાવો છો, તેના પર દુઃખના ડુંગર તૂટી પડ્યા હોય એવી બતાવો છો અને કાં તો તેને હાસ્યના વિષય તરીકે બતાવો છો.’

ભૂતકાળમાં ડોકિયું કરીએ તો પૌરાણિક સ્ત્રી પાત્રો હાસ્યનો વિષય નથી બનતી, આદરનો વિષય બને છે. એની સામે તમે આધુનિક સ્ત્રીને સ્વીકારવા નથી માંગતા. એટલે તેના ઉપર વ્યંગબાણો વરસાવો છો. એટલે આધુનિક સમયમાં માધ્યમોનો જેમ વ્યાપ વધ્યો તેમ મહિલા પરના વ્યંગનો મારો વધ્યો. વિવિધ ક્ષેત્રે સ્ત્રી ઘણી આગળ વધી ગઈ છે, પણ પુરુષના માનસમાં કોઈ પરિવર્તન નથી આવ્યું. એ તો પરંપરાગત રીતે જ વર્તે છે અને સ્ત્રીનાં વિવિધ પ્રકારનાં રૂપને સ્વીકારવા નથી માંગતો. એટલે તેને વ્યંગનો વિષય બનાવે છે. આ હાસ્ય ફૂર છે, નિર્દય છે. આ પુરુષ હૃદયની ફૂરતા છે. સ્ત્રીને લાફો મારો કે તેના પર હસો, બંને છેલ્લે તો હિંસા જ છે. સ્ત્રીને કદાચ લાફો મારો એના કરતાં તેના પર વ્યંગ કરો તો તેની પીડા વધારે થાય છે. ‘કાંકરીના માર્યા કદી ન મરીએ, મેણાના માર્યા મરીએ’ વાત અહીં એકદમ બંધ બેસે છે.

સ્ત્રી માટે પોતાના પરની રમૂજ કેટલી વેધક હોય છે તેને એક આત્યંતિક ઉદાહરણથી સમજીએ. ગંગાસતી તેમની શિષ્યા પાનબાઈને રોજ ભજન સંભળાવીને ઉપદેશ આપતાં હતા. ભજનમાં શબ્દોનો એવો ઉપયોગ કરતા હતા કે, તે શિષ્યના મર્મસ્થાને વાગે અને તેની ગ્રંથિઓ તૂટે. ભજનનો ક્રમ થોડો આગળ વધે છે ત્યારે એક દિવસ પાનબાઈ ગંગાસતીને એક ભજન સંભળાવીને પોતાની વ્યથા વર્ણવે છે. જેમાં પાનબાઈ કહે છે કે, ‘છૂટા છૂટા તીર રે અમને મારો મા રે બાઈજી, મેં થી સહ્યું નવ જાય જી. કલેબા અમારો વિંધી નાપ્યા બાઈજી, ને છાતી મારી ફાટુ ફાટુ થાય જી...’ મતલબ કે શબ્દોનાં તીર અધ્યાત્મની અમુક ઊંચાઈ પામેલાં પાનબાઈને પણ વિહ્વળ કરી જતી હોય તો એક સામાન્ય મહિલાને વ્યંગ કેટલું મર્મભેદી બની રહે તે વિચાર કરવો ઘટે.

મહિલાને વસ્તુઓમાં તબદીલ કરી નાખતા આ સમાજમાં આવા દુયકાઓ બળતામાં ઘી હોમવાનું કામ કરી શકે છે. આપણા સમાજમાં નારીને ભોગની વસ્તુ બનાવવા માટે વર્ષોથી ષડ્યંત્ર રચવામાં આવી રહ્યું છે. આ માનસિકતામાંથી સુદર્શન મહારાજ જેવા કહી દે છે કે, બળાત્કાર અનિવાર્ય બની જાય તો તેને એન્જોય કરો. આ સૂત્ર કઈ જમીનને મજબૂત કરી રહ્યું છે? દરેક આજ્ઞાનું પાલન કરવાનું જોવા ટેવાયેલો આદિ પુરુષ આવે કોઈ પણ ડગલે પોતાની અવહેલના સહન કરી શકતો નથી. નાની-નાની

વાતે એના અહમ્ને ઠેસ પહોંચે છે અને ઘાયલ થતો રહે છે.

રોજબરોજ ફેસબુક જેવા સોશિયલ પ્લેટફોર્મ પર મહિલાઓ માટે અભદ્ર, અપમાનજનક વ્યંગ, ટુચકા એવી રીતે લખવામાં આવે છે કે જેને જોઈને સમજદાર માણસને બહુ પીડા થાય. આવા હલકા વિચારોના પ્રદર્શનથી તેની મહાનતા કદી સિદ્ધ થઈ શકે નહીં. આ વાત આવી રમૂજના સર્જકોને નોંધી રાખવા જેવી છે.

હાસ્યકાર, લેખક કે કવિ મહિલાને મજાકનો વિષય બનાવીને પોતાના રોટલા શેકવાની પ્રવૃત્તિ હવે સહનશક્તિ બહાર જઈ રહી છે. લાગે છે કે, એમને પત્ની કે મહિલા સિવાય રમૂજ માટે બીજો કોઈ વિષય જ નથી મળતો પોતાની રચનાઓ માટે. જેના પર લખીને પોતાની સમજ કે રમૂજનો પરિચય આપી શકાય એવા એ સિવાયના ઢગલો સામાજિક વિષયો છે.

સ્ત્રી અસ્મિતાને વારે વારે અપમાનિત કરવા સિવાયનો ઘણી રમૂજ પાછળનો બીજો કોઈ અર્થ હોતો નથી. હાસ્ય તો સ્વસ્થ સમાજની ઓળખ છે, પણ તેને કોઈનાં દુઃખની મજાકનું કારણ બનાવવા કે કોઈ વર્ગને અપમાનિત કરવાનું માધ્યમ બને તો આપણે એ વિચારવું રહ્યું કે, આપણે સામાજિક સંવેદનશીલતા અને સભ્યતાના કયા પગથિયે ઊભા છીએ.

ઘણા ટુચકાઓને માત્ર હસીને કાઢી નાખવાને બદલે જો આપણે એ ટુચકાઓના અર્થને પણ સમજવાની કોશિશ કરીએ તો બની શકે કે તે અર્થ આપણા હોઠ પરથી હાસ્ય ગાયબ કરી દે.

મહિલાઓનું સન્માન દરેકે જાળવવું જોઈએ. દિલ્હીમાં જો નિર્ભયા જેવી ઘટનાઓને બનતી અટકાવવી હશે તો પહેલાં દરેકે તેના મોબાઈલમાં આવતા બીભત્સ ફોટા અને એસએમએસ કે વીડિયો વાઈરલ ન કરવા અને જો મોબાઈલમાં હોય તો ડિલીટ કરવા. આટલું કરીએ તો પણ સ્ત્રીઓના સન્માનનું એક મોટું કામ કર્યું ગણાશે, સ્વાઈન ફ્લુ કરતાં પણ આ ખતરનાક વાયરસ છે. ભારતીય સંસ્કૃતિમાં સ્ત્રીઓને શક્તિ તરીકે પૂજવામાં આવી છે, ત્યારે ફિલ્મોમાં, સોશિયલ મીડિયામાં કે મંચ પર સ્ત્રીઓને ટાર્ગેટ કરી હાસ્ય સર્જવાનો પ્રયાસ કરવામાં આવે તે યોગ્ય નથી. સ્ત્રીઓને રમૂજનું પાત્ર કોઈ બનાવે તો માની લેવું કે એ વ્યક્તિનું ઘરે કંઈ ચાલતું નથી એટલે બહાર દાઝ ઉતારે છે.!

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **HIMMAT KATARIA**

A Senior Reporter with the leading Gujarati weekly ABHIYAN, Himmat Kataria has done many path breaking stories. He has also worked in the medium of television in various capacities. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Feature

# जो औरत अपनी अपनी चॉइस बताए, वह स्लट?

[www.navbharattimes.indiatimes.com](http://www.navbharattimes.indiatimes.com), April 1, 2015

**य**ह दुनिया का नियम है कि भेदभाव और नाइंसाफी चुपचाप सहने वालों को शक्तिशाली वर्ग पसंद करता है। वहीं अपनी आवाज बुलंद करने वाले को विद्रोही और अराजक कहा जाता है। यह बात हर जगह लागू होती है। फिर चाहे वे अमीर और गरीब हों या फिर पुरुष और महिला। जब गरीब, पूजीपंतियों और सरकार से अपना हक मांगते हैं तो विकास विरोधी और देशद्रोही हो जाते हैं। ठीक इसी तरह जब महिलाएं पितृसत्ता के विरोध में खड़ी होती हैं तो वे स्लट (वेश्या/बदचलन) हो जाती हैं।

हालांकि महिला और पुरुष एक दूसरे के विरोधी नहीं बल्कि पूरक हैं लेकिन अफसोस कि उन्हें आमने-सामने आना पड़ा है। मैं बात कर रही हूँ होमी अदजनिया की शॉर्ट फिल्म 'माइ चॉइस' के बारे में। इस विडियो में दीपिका पादुकोण ने महिलाओं से जुड़े कई मुद्दों पर बात की है। जैसी कि मुझे उम्मीद थी, इस विडियो का विरोध होना शुरू हो गया। सोशल मीडिया पर दीपिका पादुकोण का मजाक उड़ना शुरू हो गया, उन्हें 'स्लट' और 'होर' तक कहा जाने लगा। अच्छी बात है कि आज हम इतने ऐक्टिव हो गए हैं, हर मसले पर अपनी राय रख रहे हैं लेकिन जरा सोचिए किसी ने महिला ने अपना पक्ष क्या रखा उसे गालियां मिलनी शुरू हो गईं।

माइ चॉइस विडियो की आलोचना करने में कोई बुराई नहीं है। इसकी कुछ बातों से मैं भी असहमत हूँ लेकिन विडियो के जरिए उठाए गए ज्यादातर मुद्दे प्रासंगिक हैं। यह सवाल बार-बार उठाया जा रहा है कि दीपिका को सामाजिक मुद्दे तभी याद क्यों आते हैं जब उनकी कोई फिल्म रिलीज होने वाली होती है। जाहिर है मई में उनकी फिल्म पीकू आने वाली हैं इसलिए अब माइ चॉइस विडियो को इससे जोड़कर भी देखा जा रहा है। काफी हद तक संभव है कि यह विडियो फिल्म के प्रमोशन के लिहाज से बनाया भी गया हो लेकिन क्या सिर्फ इस वजह से इसमें उठाए गए सवाल कमतर हो जाएंगे? वैसे अगर एक साल में दीपिका की तीन या चार फिल्में आती हैं तो इसका मतलब यह है कि उन्हें कभी बोलना ही नहीं चाहिए। क्योंकि वह जब भी कुछ बोलेंगी वह उनकी फिल्म के प्रमोशन के लिए होगा, है ना?

विडियो में दीपिका कह रही हैं यह मेरा शरीर है, मेरा दिमाग है इसलिए चॉइस भी मेरी होगी। इसमें गलत क्या है? जिस समाज में लड़कियों को सलाह दी जाती है कि वे अजनबी पुरुष से बात न करें लेकिन एक दिन एक अजनबी पुरुष से ही उनकी शादी कर दी जाती है, जहां उन्हें अपनी पसंद-नापसंद बताने तक का हक नहीं है, वहां अगर महिलाओं की चॉइस की बात की जा रही है तो इसमें गलत

क्या है? अगर वह कह रही हैं कि चाहे मैं अपनी बॉडी का साइज जीरो रखूं या साइज 15, यह मेरी मर्जी है, तो इसमें क्या गलत है? हम महिलाओं को अपने लुक्स को लेकर जितनी चिंता करनी पड़ती है क्या वह पुरुषों को करनी पड़ती है? कितनी शादी के विज्ञापनों में आपने देखा है कि छह फुट लंबा, गोरा, छरहरा और सुंदर वर चाहिए? कितने लड़कों को लड़की वाले सिर्फ इसलिए रिजेक्ट करते हैं कि उनका रंग सांवला है या वे थोड़े मोटे हैं?

अगर वह कह रही हैं कि यह मेरी मर्जी है कि सात बिलियन लोगों में से मैं तुम्हें चुनूं या नहीं, तो इसमें क्या गलत है? जिस समाज में लड़की की ना को हां माना जाता हो, उसका पीछा करके और रास्ते पर उसकी बांह पकड़कर उसे पटाने का चलन हो, इनकार करने पर उसके चेहरे पर ऐसिड फेंकने का चलन हो, वहां अगर कोई लड़की अपनी चॉइस की बात करती है तो इसमें गलत क्या है? आज तक कितनी लड़कियों ने लड़कों पर ऐसिड फेंका है?

अब बात करते हैं अपनी चॉइस के कपड़े पहनने की। लोग कह रहे हैं कि छोटे और अश्लील कपड़े पहनना महिला सशक्तीकरण नहीं है। हेलो! बात छोटे या बड़े कपड़े पहने की नहीं बल्कि बात अपनी मर्जी और सुविधा के मुताबिक कपड़े चुनने की है। जरा बताइए, कितने पुरुष बुर्का पहनते हैं, कितने पुरुषों को अपने ससुराल वालों के सामने इस बात की चिंता सताती है कि कहीं उनकी साड़ी का पल्लू माथे से नीचे न चला जाए?

पुरुष तौलिये और बनियान में द्वार पर बैठकर गप-शप कर सकते हैं लेकिन वहीं महिलाएं शॉर्ट्स पहन लें तो लोगों की आंखों को असुविधा होने लगती है। छोटे कपड़े में लड़की को देखकर पुरुष उत्तेजित हो जाते हैं और उत्तेजना में रेप तक कर देते हैं। मैंने तो कभी नहीं सुना कि तौलिया पहने, बनियान और लुंगी पहने या शॉर्ट्स पहने किसी लड़के से छेड़छाड़ हुई हो या उसे स्लट कहा गया हो। अरे हां, सॉरी, स्लट और होर तो सिर्फ महिलाएं होती हैं ना? पुरुषों के लिए तो ऐसे शब्द ही नहीं गढ़े गए हैं। डिक्शनरी उठाकर देख लीजिए स्त्री को अपमानित करने वाले बीसियों शब्द मिल जाएंगे लेकिन पुरुष के लिए महज एक या दो। वे बड़े चरित्रवान और शालीन जो होते हैं।

कितने लड़कों की शादी के समय लड़की वाले कहते हैं कि जरा धोती पहनकर अपनी फोटो भेजना। क्योंकि लड़की वालों से तो यह मांग की जाती है कि साड़ी में फोटो भेजना। लड़के वाले जब लड़की देखने आते हैं तो उससे साड़ी पहनने की उम्मीद करते हैं, लड़का भी धोती या पारंपरिक कपड़े पहन कर आता है क्या? दहेज आज भी लड़की के परिवार को ही देना पड़ता है।

दीपिका अगर कहती हैं मैं किसी से ताउम्र प्यार करूं या थोड़े समय के लिए तो लोगों को इसमें इतनी मिर्ची क्यों लग रही है? यही काम लड़का करे तो स्टड और लड़की करे तो स्लट? ये दोहरे मानक क्यों भला? कितने पुरुष हैं तो ताउम्र एक ही महिला से प्यार करते हैं? अगर आप ऐसा नहीं कर सकते तो फिर हमसे यह उम्मीद क्यों पालते हैं? क्या कहा? आप हमें देवी मानते हैं? अरे नहीं, प्लीज, हमें देवी मत बनाइए। हमें तो इंसान समझ लीजिए, इतना ही हमारे लिए काफी है।

विडियो में कहा गया है, यह मेरी मर्जी है कि मैं लड़के से प्यार करूं या लड़की से या फिर दोनों से। इस पर तो बात ही करना मुश्किल है, हमारे देश में यह गैरकानूनी है। आईपीसी का सेक्शन 377 तो समलैंगिक संबंधों को अपराध ठहराता है। यह बात इसलिए जरूरी है क्योंकि कई जगहों पर लेज्बियन लड़कियों का लड़कों से रेप कराया जाता है, जिसे 'करेक्टिव रेप' कहा जाता है। बहुत से लोगों का मानना है कि लेज्बियंस पागल होती हैं और उन्होंने कभी लड़कों के साथ सेक्स नहीं किया है इसलिए उन्हें पता नहीं होता कि इसमें क्या 'सुख' है। इसलिए उस 'सुख' का अहसास कराने के लिए लेज्बियन लड़की का रेप कराया जाता है। यह बिल्कुल ऐसा है जैसे किसी स्ट्रेट लड़के का लड़के से रेप कराया जाए और फिर पूछा जाए— कैसा लगा? अच्छा लगा?

वैसे भी हमारे यहां औरतों को तो सेक्शुअलिटी और सेक्स के बारे में सोचने की इजाजत तभी मिलती है जब उनके पास उनका पति हो। क्या यह सूरत बदलनी नहीं चाहिए? सेक्स और सेक्शुअल ओरिएन्टेशन बहुत ही पर्सनल बातें हैं और इस बारे में सबकी अपनी चॉइस होनी ही चाहिए। इसमें भी मुझे कुछ गलत नहीं दिखता। हां, बात अगर 'सेक्स आउटसाइड मैरेज' की बात है तो मैं इससे सहमत नहीं हूं। पूरे विडियो में सिर्फ यही एक मसला है जिससे मैं असहमत हूं।

दीपिका कहती हैं कि मैं बच्चे को जन्म दूं या न दूं, यह मेरी मर्जी है। इसे व्यापक अर्थ में देखे जाने की जरूरत है। बच्चा पति और पत्नी दोनों का होता है और इसमें दोनों की सहमति होनी चाहिए। हालांकि, अभी भी इस मामले में पति की ही मर्जी ज्यादा चलती है। पति तो दूर, महिला के सास-ससुर और बाकी घर वालों की भी मर्जी चलती है। शादी हुई नहीं कि, 'बहू पोता कब खिलाने को मिलेगा?' जैसे सवाल पूछे जाने लगते हैं।

महिला मां बनने के लिए शारीरिक और मानसिक तौर पर तैयार है भी या नहीं, इसकी परवाह कम ही लोगों को होती है। मां एक औरत ही बनती है, बच्चे को नौ महीने पेट में वही रखती है। प्रसव का दर्द भी वही झेलती है और उसके बाद छोटे बच्चे की देखरेख में भी मां की भूमिका सबसे ज्यादा अहम होती है। बच्चा पैदा होने के बाद औरत के शरीर में आंतरिक और बाहरी तौर पर जो बदलाव आते हैं, उनकी फिक्र कौन करता है? हां, मां बनने के बाद औरत मोटी हो जाए तो उसका मजाक बड़ी आसानी से उड़ाया जाता है।

गर्भ में अगर लड़की है या अनचाहा बच्चा है तो अबॉर्शन कराओ। औरतों का जब रदस्ती अबॉर्शन कराया जाता है, उनकी मर्जी पूछी तक नहीं जाती। और तो और हमारे संत और मौलवी भी औरतों को सलाह देने लग गए हैं, चार बच्चे पैदा करो, पांच बच्चे पैदा करो, दस बच्चे पैदा करो। बच्चे नहीं चाहिए तो नसबंदी भी औरत ही कराए। आंकड़े देख लीजिए तो पता चल जाएगा कि महिलाओं की तुलना में कितने कम पुरुष हैं जो नसबंदी कराते हैं। अब अगर इस मामले में कोई औरत अपनी चॉइस की बात करती है तो इसमें क्या गलत है?

सोशल मीडिया पर दीपिका को जमकर कोसा जा रहा है। कोसने वालों में महिलाएं और पुरुष दोनों शामिल हैं। पितृसत्ता सिर्फ पुरुषों पर ही नहीं, महिलाओं पर भी

हावी है। लोग साइना नेहवाल और दीपिका की तुलना कर रहे हैं। मैं खुद भी साइना की बहुत बड़ी प्रशंसक हूँ लेकिन यह तुलना क्या न्यायसंगत है?

पुरुष कह रहे हैं कि अगर तुम्हारी चॉइस है तो हमारी भी चॉइस है। माइ चॉइस का मेल वर्शन भी फटाफट सोशल मीडिया के बाजार में आ गया। जनाब, आपको तो आपकी चॉइस पहले से मिली हुई है। हमें अभी तक हासिल नहीं हुई इसलिए आज इस विडियो की जरूरत पड़ी है। सालों से आप हम पर राज करते आए हैं, आज भी कर रहे हैं। अब अगर हम अपने हक और चॉइस की बात कर रहे हैं तो आपकी सिट्टी-पिट्टी गुम हो गई? आप हमें अराजक और स्लट कहने लगे? अगर अपना हक मांगने से मैं स्लट बन जाती हूँ, तो मुझे इसकी परवाह नहीं।

मैं यह नहीं कहूँगी कि इस विडियो से असहमति जताने वाला हर शख्स महिला विरोधी है। विरोधियों के भी अपने तर्क हैं और उन्हें सिरे से खारिज भी नहीं किया जा सकता। पहली बात तो यह कि बॉलिवुड में खुद ही महिलाओं और पुरुषों में भेदभाव किया जाता है। वरना शादी के बाद हिरोइनों का करियर खत्म नहीं हो जाता और 50 साल के खान 20 साल की हिरोइनों के साथ रोमांस न कर रहे होते। ऐक्टर्स और ऐक्ट्रेसज को मिलने वाली फीस में भी बड़ा अंतर है, बॉलिवुड की कितनी फिल्में महिला पर केंद्रित होती हैं? सवाल ढेरों हैं और इन्हें नकारा नहीं जा सकता लेकिन इन वजहों से फिल्म में उठाए गए मुद्दे कमजोर नहीं पड़ते।

मैं मानती हूँ हमारे देश में आधे से ज्यादा महिलाओं की चिंता हॉटपैट में घूमना या शादी से पहले सेक्स करना नहीं है। उनकी चिंता है बराबर की शिक्षा मिलना, मजदूरी करने पर बराबर पैसे मिलना और शराब पीकर आए पति से न पिटना। फिर भी होमी अदजानिया और दीपिका के उठाए मुद्दों का महिला सशक्तीकरण से कोई लेना-देना नहीं है, यह कहना सरासर गलत है। सेक्शुअल एंपावरमेंट भी एंपावरमेंट का ही एक हिस्सा है।

यह विडियो अराजकतावादी नहीं है। दरअसल यह उस बराबरी की बात करता है जहां तक हममें से बहुतों की सोच भी नहीं पहुंच पा रही है। यह उस बराबरी और सशक्तीकरण की बात करता है जो हासिल करने में हमें अभी बहुत देर लगेगी। यह उस बराबरी के बारे में जो हमें तभी हासिल होगी जब हम औरतों को उनके बुनियादी हक दे पाएंगे और अभी तक बुनियादी हक भी हमें मिल नहीं पाए हैं।

खैर, चाहे आप दीपिका से नफरत करें या उनकी तारीफ करें, आखिरकार आप उनके बारे में बात कर रहे हैं। बधाई हो, आपने उनकी पीआर टीम के मकसद को अंजाम तक पहुंचा दिया है।



#### SINDHUVASINI

Coming from Uttar Pradesh and having faced problems related to gender discrimination, Sindhuvasini is a young media professional striving to bring about a change by voicing her opinions and raising awareness by consistently writing on issues concerning mental health, women and sexual minorities. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Blog



# एकेकट्या आईची रोज लढाई

Lokmat, July 13, 2016

छाळेत प्रवेश, जात प्रमाणपत्र, पासपोर्ट, मुलासाठी आर्थिक तरतूद, कागदपत्रांवर पालक या नात्याने सहा, यासाठी बहुतेक सरकारी आणि गैर सरकारी व्यवस्था 'वडिलांचीच सही पाहिजे' या मुद्द्यावर अडून बसतात. त्यांचे 'ना हरकत प्रमाणपत्र' आपून घ्या, असा आग्रह धरतात. आणि त्यापायी सारे कडूघोट आईलाच पचवावे लागतात. हे सारं का ? कशासाठी ?



रतर एकेरी पालकत्व निभावणारी आई, ही काही भारतीय समाजातली अनोखी घटना नाही. विधवा, परित्यक्ता, घटस्फोटीत, अविवाहित अशा कितीतरी कारणं तांनी एकट्या असलेल्या असंख्य बायका आपण आपल्या आजूबाजूला पाहात अस. तो. बरेचदा अशा स्त्रिया कष्टकरी वर्गातल्या असतात. आपली नेहमीची भाजीवाली, कचरावाली किंवा आपल्या घरी रोज येणारी मोलकरीण सुद्धा एकेरी पालक असते – पण त्यांच्या सम. स्यांकडे पाहून त्यांची थोडीफार कीव करण्यापलीकडे आपण कधी जात नाही. पण मुंबई, पुणे, नागपूर सारख्या मोठ्या शहरांमध्ये अनेक मध्यमवर्गीय, सुशिक्षित नोकरदार महिलासुद्धा ताढ मानेने आपले एकेरी पालकत्व निभावत असतात. जरी अशा महिलांना समाज जीवनातून अगदी खड्यासारखे वेगळे काढले नसले तरी शक्यतो त्यांच्यापासून चार पावलं दूर राहण्याचेच आपले धोरण असते. समाजाने आखून दिलेल्या लग्नाच्या चौकटीला ओलांडण्याचे धाडस केलेली बाई – म्हणजे वॉईटच असणार, अशी जणू आपली मनोमन खात्री असते! त्यामुळे नवऱ्याशिवाय एकट्या राहणाऱ्या स्त्रीच्या प्रत्येक हालचालीकडे संशयाने पाहिले जाते. ती कुठल्या पुरुषाशी किती वेळ बोलते, तिच्या घरी कोण – कधी – किती वेळा ये – जा करते या सगळ्यावर लक्ष ठेवण्यात आपण इतके दंग असतो की तिला काही अडचणी आहेत का, मदत हवी असेल काय असे विचारदेखील मनात येत नाहीत! आपल्याकडे आजही कुटुंब म्हटलं की आई – वडील आणि त्यांची मुलं असंच ठरीव चित्र बहुतेकांच्या डोळ्यासमोर येतं. त्यामुळे ज्या कुटुंबात वडील नाहीत अशा कुटुंबांच्या अस्तित्वाची कल्पनासुद्धा सहसा अनेकांच्या मनात येत नाही. आणि अशी जी कुटुंबं असतात ती अनेकांना रुचतही नाही.

त्याचमुळे ६ जुलै रोजी जेव्हा सुप्रीम कोर्टाने अविवाहित मातेला तिच्या मुलांविषयीचे सर्व निर्णय घेण्याचे अधिकार बहाल केले तेव्हा कुठे सर्वसामान्य मध्यमवर्गीय माणसांच्या किमान एवढे तरी लक्षात आले की इतके वर्ष या साध्या गोष्टीसाठी देखील अनेक एकल मातांना झगडावे लागत होते. या निर्णयाचे सध्या 'क्रांतिकारी निर्णय' आणि 'पुरोगामी विचार' म्हणून बऱ्याच मोठ्या प्रमाणात स्वागत होते आहे. दुसरीकडे मात्र आपल्या याच समाजात असंख्य लोक असे आहेत, ज्यांना या निर्णयामुळे आश्चर्याचा धक्का बसलाय. पण आजवर एकेरी पालकत्व निभावणाऱ्या आईला आपल्या समाजात काय अडचणी येत असतील, मुलांची सगळी जबाबदारी उत्तम निभावूनही त्या आईला आणि तिच्या मुलांना कायद्यातल्या त्रुटींचा कसा जाच होत असेल, याचा अनेकांना किंचित अंदाजही नसतो.

मूल अठरा वर्षांचे होईपर्यंत – शाळेत प्रवेश घेणे, जातीचे प्रमाणपत्र मिळवणे, पासपोर्ट तयार करणे, अपघात – आजारपणासारख्या कठीण प्रसंगी किंवा आपल्या मुलासाठी आर्थिक तरतूद करण्यासाठी देखील अनेक कागदपत्रांवर पालक या नात्याने सहा करायची गरज असते.

त्यावेळी बहुतेक सरकारी आणि गैर सरकारी व्यवस्था मुलाच्या वडिलांचीच सही पाहिजे – या मुद्द्यावर अडून बसतात. मुलांचे वडील उपस्थित राहू शकत नाहीत असे सांगितले तरी त्यांचे 'ना हरकत प्रमाणपत्र' तरी आणून द्या – असा आग्रह धरला जातो. तेवढ्या कारणासाठी ज्या पुरुषाने अनेक वर्षात आपल्या मुलांचे तोंड पाहिलेले नसेल अशा पुरुषाची या एकल आईला मनधरणी करावी लागते. जर एखाद्या ठिकाणी अॅफिडेविट करून काम भागणार असेल तर त्यासाठी वकील शोधणे, रजिस्ट्रारसमोर सद्दा करणे या निमित्ताने अनेक अनोळखी माणसांसमोर आपण एकटीने राहत असल्याचे उघड करावे लागते! केवळ कुटुंबात पुरुष नसल्यामुळे लहान सहान निर्णयासाठी असे किचकट सोपस्कार पार पाडावे लागतात, कधीकधी महत्त्वाचे निर्णय लांबणीवर पडतात. या त्रासदायक अनुभवांमुळे आपल्या कुटुंबात जणूकाही कसलीतरी कमतरता आहे, असा न्यूनगंड मुलांच्या आणि आईच्याही मनात तयार व्हायला लागतो. आजूबाजूचा समाजही दुरावा कायम टिकवून धरताना याच न्यूनगंडाला खतपाणी घालतो. म्हणून मग या न्यूनगंडाचे प्रतिबिंब सर्वच व्यवहारात दिसायला लागते. या दुष्टचक्राला सुप्रीम कोर्टाच्या नव्या क्रांतिकारी निर्णयामुळे आळा घातला जाईल अशी आशा आहे.

अविवाहित आईने जन्म दिलेल्या मुलाच्या जन्मदाखल्यावर मुलांच्या वडिलांच्या नावाची नोंद करण्याची आता कुणी सक्ती करू शकणार नाही. आपल्या मुलाविषयीचे निर्णय घेण्यासाठी अविवाहित महिलेला आता त्या मुलाच्या वडिलांच्या 'ना हरकत प्रमाणपत्र'ची गरज राहणार नाही किंवा तिला स्वतःचे पालकत्व सिद्ध करण्यासाठी जागोजाग अॅफिडेविट देत बसावी लागणार नाहीत. मुलांचे हित हाच महत्त्वाचा मुद्दा आहे, अशा सकारात्मक दृष्टीकोनातून कोर्टाने एकल मातेकडे पालकत्वाचे अधिकार सोपवले आहेत. सर्वोच्च न्यायालयाच्या या ताज्या निर्णयानुसार आता अविवाहित आईसुद्धा आपल्या मुलाची कायदेशीर पालक म्हणून सगळे निर्णय घेऊ शकणार आहे! त्या मुलाच्या पित्याचे नाव जाहीर करायचीदेखील सक्ती असणार नाही.

सध्यातरी हा निर्णय फक्त अविवाहित मातेच्या संदर्भात मर्यादित स्वरूपात समोर आलेला आहे. आता अनेक कारणांनी विवाहाशिवाय मातृत्व स्वीकारणार्या महिलांची संख्या वाढते आहे त्यांना या पुरोगामी निर्णयाचा फायदा नक्कीच होईल. पंधरा वर्षांपूर्वी घटस्फोटीत आईलासुद्धा मुलाची नैसर्गिक पालक मानले जात नव्हते. पण 1999 साली गीता हरिहरन नावाच्या लढाऊ महिलेने वडिलांइतकाच नैसर्गिक पालक म्हणून आईलाही हक्क आहे, असा ऐतिहासिक निर्णय कोर्टाकडून मिळवला होता. त्यानंतर अविवाहित मातेला पालकत्वाचे सगळे हक्क असण्यावर शिक्कामोर्तब व्हायला एवढा काल जावा लागला. अनेक महिलांनी यासाठी दिलेली झुंज आणि सिद्ध केलेले कर्तृत्व या निर्णयांना आधारभूत ठरलेले आहे. समाजाची मानसिकता देखील अगदी हळूहळू का असेना पण बदलत गेलेली आहे. केवळ अविवाहित माताच नव्हे तर प्रत्येकच आई ही तिच्या मुलांची नैसर्गिक आणि कायदेशीर पालक असते – असा निर्णयदेखील लवकरच आपल्यासमोर येईल अशी आशा आहे! सर्वसामान्य माणसे जेव्हा 'एकल माता' – या वास्तवाला समाजात सहजपणे सामावून घेतील तेव्हा एकल मातांचे आणि त्यांच्या मुलांचे आयुष्य सुकर व्हायला खरी मदत होईल!



#### VANDANA KHARE

A feminist writer and theatre activist Vandana Khare has published more than 200 articles related to gender and sexuality in almost all leading Marathi Publications. She also facilitates participatory communication processes in association with various NGOs. Recipient of LMAAGS 2015-16-Best Feature

## একলা মায়ের জয়গাথায় সিলমোহর

'তুমি কী বলছ দিদি? এ কথা সত্যি?' ফেলের ও প্রান্তে গলাটা খনই উচ্ছল শোনায় লক্ষ্মীর (নাম পরিবর্তিত) গলাটা। কিন্তু তার পরেই কেমন যেন মিথিয়ে যায়। কান্নাভেজা স্বরে বলে, 'এ কথাটা তুমি যদি আগে বলতে। ও থাকলে আজ ৪ মাসের হত।'

কথোপকথনে ছেদ ফেলে দীর্ঘশ্বাস। 'ও' মানে লক্ষ্মীর সেই অ-জাত সন্তান। যাকে সে সাড়ে তিন মাস গর্ভে ধারণ করেছিল। কিন্তু লোকলজ্জার ভয়ে শেষ পর্যন্ত 'খসিয়ে আসে'। কিন্তু মনটা ঢুকরে কাঁদে আজও। 'খালি মলে হয়, বাপের নাম বলতে পারলে তো ওকে রাখতাম। ... এখন তুমি বলছ বাবা ছাড়াই মা সব পারবে। আগে যদি বলতে...!'

আগে বলার উপায় ছিল না। কারণ সোমবারই সুপ্রিম কোর্টের যুগান্তকারী রায় অবিবাহিত একলা মায়েরদের একক অভিভাবকত্বকে স্বীকৃতি দিয়েছে। সবাই অবশ্য লক্ষ্মীর মতো দুর্ভাগা নয়। গণধর্ষণের শিকার হওয়ার এসে গিয়েছিল অবিবাহিত মাতৃরা। তাও গর্ভপাতে সায় ছিল না ওরা। কিন্তু সমাজ, লোকলজ্জা, পিতৃ পরিচয়ের চোখরাঙানিকে ছাপিয়ে যেতে পারেনি মাতৃদের বহুল। অপত্যরহে।

যে বাবা সন্তানের অস্তিত্বই জানে না বা যে 'পিতা'র সন্তানের বড় হয়ে ওঠায় কোনও ভূমিকাই থাকবে না, তা হলে কেন মায়ের একক অভিভাবকত্ব স্বীকৃত করতে সেই ব্যক্তির অনুমতির প্রয়োজন? সে জন্যই সমাজবিজ্ঞানীরা মলে করছেন, এ দিনের রায় যুগান্তকারী। এর ফলে সময় লাগলেও পরিবর্তন হবে সমাজের সৃষ্টিভঙ্গিও। ঠিক যেমনটা দেখানো হয়েছিল একটি বহুজাতিক সংস্থার বিজ্ঞাপনে। মা-মেয়ের সুখের সংসার। তা নিয়ে কত উকিঝুকি, কথাবাতা! রূ অবশেষে সত্যিটা জানতে পেলে চমকে ওঠা--- 'আমি সিসল মাদার। ও আমার মেয়ে। এটাই ওর পরিচয়!'

এই একলা-মায়ের পরিচয়টা কিন্তু ঝেঁষতেও বেছে নিচ্ছেন অলেকে। যেমন বিজলি। দিল্লির যৌনপরিতে বেশ নামডাক ভার। আছে সাত বছরের একটি ছেলেও। বললেন, 'আগে আমার ছেলের বাপ-মা আমিই। কোটকী বলল ভাতে আমার কী হবে গো? আমার ছেলের বাবা কে আমি জানি। কিন্তু ওকে জানাব না। ও আমার ছেলে, যে এক দিন বড় গাড়ি চড়বে, বড় নওকরি করবে। আমি, আমি সব করব ওর জন্য।'

ভেমনই র্নবেছেন নীলা গুপ্তার মতো অভিলেপ্ত্রীও। যিনি আজ থেকে ২৭ বছর আগে একক মাতৃয়ের জয়গাথায় জন্ম দিয়েছিলেন সন্ন্যাসিত রিচার্জের সন্তান মাসাবাকে। সে দিন খটে গিয়েছিল এক নিঃশব্দ বিলব। কারণ সেই সময় অবিবাহিতা কোনও মহিলা তাঁর ভালোবাসার সঙ্গীর সন্তানকে জন্ম দিচ্ছেন --- বিববতা এতটা সহজ ছিল না। তবে

তার সেই সাহসী সিদ্ধান্ত ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছিল, তার উদাহরণে অনুপ্রাণিত হবে এগিয়ে এলে সমাজের বেড়ি এক দিন সরিয়ে দিতে পারবেন মহিলারাই। সেই অদৃশ্য শৃঙ্খলটা যেন আজ কিছুটা সরে পেল। সে কথাই মলে করছেন আত্রেয়ী।

তিনি ঝেঁষায় একলা-মা। যাকে ভালোবাসতেন, তাঁর ঔরসজাত সন্তান তিতলি। তিনি চাকরি করেন একটি বহুজাতিক সংস্থায়। বিবেটা শেষ পর্যন্ত হয়নি। সেই ব্যক্তি তিতলিকে নিজের মেয়ে বলে স্বীকারও করতে চাননি কোনও দিন। ভাতে দামেনি আত্রেয়ী। তাই নির্দিধায় বললেন, 'এই র্ন্নকে স্বাগত জানাচ্ছি। যে লোকটা নিজের মেয়েকে স্বীকারই করেন না, তাঁর থেকে কীসের সম্মতি? আর ডিজোর্সিদের ক্ষেত্রে তো এমন কিছুই নেই, তা হলে সিসল মাদারদের ক্ষেত্রেই বা এত দিন ছিল কেন?' আত্রেয়ী বললেন, 'আমি নিজের ইচ্ছায় আমার তিতলিকে জন্ম দিয়েছি। ও আমার সব কিছু। সুলে ভর্তি করতে একটু অবশ্য সমস্যা হয়েছিল, কিন্তু এখন সব ঠিক হয়ে গেছে।'

কিন্তু এটার জন্য তো রীতিমতো সাহসের প্রয়োজন? তিতলির মা বললেন, 'আমার বাবা-মা আমাকে সব সময় সমর্থন করেছেন। আত্রেয়ীস্বজন বঁকা হাসি হেসেছেন, কিন্তু বাবা সাহস জুগিয়ে গিয়েছেন। অচ্চ উনি বেশ পুরোনোপন্থী লোক। কিন্তু মেয়ের জন্যই বোধ হয় বাস্তবকে মেনে নিয়েছিলেন। আর এখন? বাবা বেজায় গবর্তিত!'

তার মানে কি খরে নিতে হবে একলা মায়েরদের একটা নতুন দিশা দেখাল সুপ্রিম কোর্ট? এর ফলে কি কমাতে গর্ভপাতের প্রবণতাও? সমাজকর্মী ও আইনজীবীরা মলে করছেন, এখনও জটটা উন্মোচনের সময় আসেনি। নামপ্রকাশে অনিচ্ছুক একজন পাবলিক প্রসিকিউটর বললেন, 'এর ভালো দিক যেমন আছে, অন্য দিকটাও

উড়িয়ে দেওয়ার মতো নয়। কোনও ধর্ষিতা যদি ধর্ষণের ফলে গর্ভবতী হয়ে পড়েন, সেটা অতিযুক্তকে অপরাধী প্রমাণ করার বড় সুযোগ। এমনও তো হতে পারে একক অভিভাবক স্বীকৃতি হওয়ায় কোনও কোনও মহিলা হয়তো লোকলজার ডয়ে ধর্ষণের বিষয়টাকে লঘু করে দেখাবেন।' তবে সে কথা মানছেন না সমাজকর্মীরা। তাঁদের যুক্তি, 'একক অভিভাবক অবশ্যই মহিলাদের শক্তি বাড়াবে। কিন্তু কোনও মেয়ে সে জন্য ধর্ষণের মতো অপরাধকে লঘু করে দেখাবে, এমনটা হতে পারে না।' কিন্তু ধর্ষণ বা সহবাসের বাইরেও তো আছে একক মাতৃত্বের স্বাদ। যেমনটা দেখেছেন অনিদ্ভিতা সর্বাধিকারী। তিনি স্পার্মব্যাঙ্ক থেকে স্পার্ম কিনে নিজের গর্ভে প্রতিস্থাপন করান। বিয়ে না-করেও গর্ভের মধ্যে সন্তানের ষেড়ে ওঠার প্রতিটা পর্যায়ে তিনি উপভোগ করেছেন। অবশেষে নির্ধারিত সময়েই জন্মায় তাঁর আন্দলের আনুষঙ্গিক আন্দলতের এই বক্তব্যকে স্বাগত জানিয়ে বললেন, 'আমি উন্মত্ত। বঁধন ছাড়া উল্লাসে মেতেছি...'

না-সন্তানের অস্বস্ত্য বন্ধনে, নিঃস্বার্থ ভালোবাসার স্নেহে ভাই বিজলি, অগ্রেয়ী, অনিদ্ভিতারা এক হয়ে যান। আর ভারি শক্তিতে পরমশাসিত সমাজের চক্রব্যূহে এ বেন কুম্ভেত্র জব নারীশক্তি। যে যুগান্তকারী জয়ের ফলে আর হয়তো লজায় মধু চাকতে হবে না এ যুগের সত্যকাম-জবালাদের।

**EL Samay, July 1, 2014**



**ANWESHA BANERJEE**

Anwesha is currently the chief copy editor at 'El Samay'. Stopping human trafficking has been her mission and towards this she has spent a lot of time on the field exposing the traffickers etc and rescuing children. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best News Report

## HAPPY FEET IN MUMBRA

*The Hindu, August 20, 2013*



AVING A BALL: In football, these girls from Mumbra have discovered a stress-buster recreation from academics and a boost to their self-esteem.

Eighteen-year-old Zia Mansoori (name changed) looks forward to Sunday afternoons. Leaving home on the pretext of college-related work, she meets up with 20 others who have assembled in a room. They slip out of their hijabs, don t-shirts, long socks and shoes and it's football time.

Encouraged by NGO Magic Bus, these Mumbra girls began their kicking pastime in October last. The game has since become, for them, a metaphor for freedom rather than a mere sport.

Girls playing this male-dominated sport are no longer a rare sight. But in this Muslim ghetto of Mumbra, it is no ordinary feat. Located on the outskirts of Mumbai, this township is home to a large population of communal-riots refugees. Twenty-four per cent of its women are illiterate, 92% don't work and 28% are married before the age of 17 (Mumbra-a Status Report —TISS, 2011).

Zia's family doesn't know she plays football. To preclude confrontation, she finishes her share of household chores — cooking, cleaning and caring for her 2-month-old sister — before leaving for football training. Besides her parents, Zia has four brothers and two sisters. "Abba thinks girls have to stay at home so I don't tell him I play. He doesn't even want me to study but I fight and go to college," she says.

Magic Bus initially intended to train 14-17-year-olds from Mumbra in football. But after the girls voiced their concern about playing alongside boys, the NGO made an exception. It decided to exclusively train girls of all age-groups here. Masood Akhtar, a member of Magic Bus, is the coach.

Aliya Shaikh (16) has got her father's support but faces resistance from her three brothers and mother. "My father says this is my age for fun and play even though my brothers try to stop me," she says. Most of the girls' parents work in the unorganised sector. In many cases, they are single parents. A majority of the girls study through correspondence, as they eke out a living on the side.



If assembling enough girls to constitute a game of football was a challenge, making them stay on was far more complex. "We started distributing pamphlets in schools and colleges urging girls to come for training. Forty girls signed up but the enthusiasm petered out. We are now left with a team of 20 girls," says Saba from the Forum Against Oppression of Women, one of the social workers. "Finding a ground was difficult too. Finally, we approached a temple trust which agreed to give us a ground that belonged to them."



Girls' entry into the grounds has already changed mindsets. Today, Mumbra has even seen a tournament between girls and boys. "Earlier, the boys didn't let us play on the ground where they played cricket. Now, we play together. We recently had a mixed cricket and football tournament with them," said Muskan Sayyad, a Class 10 student whose father encourages her to play as a recreation from studies.

For the oldest player, Kausar Ansari (33), Sunday sessions are a stress-buster, especially after her recent divorce. "I would just watch the young girls play until I couldn't resist stepping onto the field. Now there is no stepping back," she says. Her 14-year-old son often comes to watch.

Now, equipped with a certain level of skill, fortitude and heightened self-esteem, the girls want to enter professional football. "We want to have our own club and maybe call it the Mumbra Girls Football Club," says Fatima Mirza (20), who plays the game despite severe opposition from home.



#### **SUKHADA TATKE**

Starting her career with Times Of India and moving on to The Hindu Sukhada is now a freelance writer based in US. She writes on Culture, urban planning, society and her writings have been featured in a number of Indian as well as American Publications. Recipient of LMAAGS 2013-14-Best Human Interest Story

# ‘सृजन’कळांचा साक्षीदार

Madhurimaa, April 3, 2015

**ले** बर रूमच्या बाहेर अस्वस्थ होऊन फेर्या मारणं, इमर्जन्सीमध्ये औषधं आणण्यासाठी धावाधाव करणं, बाळाच्या जन्मानंतर पेढे वाटून आनंद व्यक्त करणं इतक्यापुरतंच ‘बाबा’नं मर्यादित राहू नये. ‘सृजन’कळांचं आपणही साक्षीदार व्हावं, आपल्या असण्यामुळे वेदनांची आवर्तनं सोसण्याचं बळ पत्नीला मिळावं, बाळाचा जन्म आपणही अनुभवावा असं प्रत्येक ‘बाबा’ला वाटायला हवं...

‘आपल्या बाळाचा जन्म पाहायला मिळणं याइतकी आनंदाची दुसरी गोष्ट नाही. बायकोच्या डिलिव्हरीच्या निमित्तानं मी लेबर रूममध्ये हजर राहिलो आणि त्यामुळेच नात्यांचे विविध पदर जपणारी स्त्री मला नव्यानं समजली. आपल्या जन्मावेळी आई कोणत्या वेदनांमधून गेली असेल, आपल्याला मोठं करतांना पालकांना, नोकरी करणार्या आईला कोणत्या दिव्यातून जावं लागलं असेल, हे कळालं. सहनशक्ती या शब्दाचा खरा अर्थ प्रसूती कळा आणि बाळाचा जन्म प्रत्यक्ष पाहिल्यानंतरच लक्ष. त येतो, असंच मी म्हणून. भारतात असतो तर बाळाच्या जन्माच्या प्रक्रियेत मला कदाचित सहभागी होता आलं नसतं. निर्मितीच्या या सोहळ्यात सहभागी होता आल्याचा, वेदना वाटून घेता आल्याचा मला अभिमान वाटतो.’

हा अनुभव आहे ऋषिकेश घोटणकर या आपल्या मित्राचा. सॉफ्टवेअर इंजिनियर असलेला मूळ अहमदनगरचा ऋषिकेश नोकरीनिमित्त लंडनला असतो. कौटुंबिक कार्यानिमित्त तो सध्या भारतात आलेला आहे. ‘लेबर रूममधली महिलेच्या पतीची उपस्थिती’ या विषयावर बोलताना त्याने मोकळेपणाने आपले अनुभव मधुरिमा वाचकांसाठी सांगितले.

‘ऑपरेशन थिएटरमध्ये आपल्या पार्टनरला कसं सांभाळून घ्यायचं याबद्दल मित्रांसोबत शेअरिंग झालेलं होतं. शिवाय डॉक्टरही वेळोवेळी मार्गदर्शन करतच होते. मात्र तरीही मनावर ताण होता. मुळातच लेबर पेनचा काळ अनिश्चित असतो. त्यात प्राचीसाठी हा काळ तेरा ते चौदा तासांपर्यंत लांबल्याने माझी अस्वस्थता वाढली होती. शेवटी शेवटी येणार्या कळा प्राची कशा सहन करत असेल हे पाहून तर मला माझं अस्वस्थ होणं क्षुल्लक वाटायला लागलं. मात्र बाळाच्या जन्मानंतरच्या पहिल्या दर्शनानं तिची सहनशक्ती सार्थकी लागल्याची भावना माझ्या मनात आली. पराकोटीच्या कळा सहन करून जर स्त्री आपल्याला बाबा होण्याचा अत्युच्च आनंद देत असेल तर बाळाच्या जन्माच्या वेळी उपस्थित राहण्याचं धाडस होऊ घातलेल्या बाबाने दाखवावंच,’ असं ऋषिकेशला वाटतं.

बायकोच्या प्रसूतीदरम्यान, तिच्या पतीनं लेबर रूममध्ये उपस्थित असणं ही बाब परदेशात गृहीत धरली जाते. किंबहुना तिथल्या डॉक्टर्सचाही तसा आग्रह असतो. प्रसूत होणार्या बायकोला आधार वाटावा आणि काही अडचणी निर्माण झाल्या

तर त्वरित निर्णय घेतले जावेत, हा त्यामागचा मुख्य उद्देश. भारतात मात्र अजूनही ही पद्धत फारशी रुळलेली नाही. अर्थ. ति मुंबई-पुण्यासारखी शहरं त्याला अपवाद आहेत. मात्र या ठिकाणीही अशा बाबांचं प्रमाण अगदीच बोटारं मोजण्या. इतकंच. शहरात अशी स्थिती, तर ग्रामीण भागाबद्दल विचार न केलेलाच बरा. मुळातच प्रसूतीदरम्यान आपणही लेबर रूममध्ये थांबू शकतो, याची माहिती भारतातल्या किती पुरुषांना आहे याबद्दलच शंका आहे. त्यातूनही डॉक्टरांनी लेबर रूममध्ये थांबण्याबद्दलची कल्पना दिली तर कितीजण यासाठी तयार असतात, हा स्वतंत्र चर्चेचा विषय होऊ शकतो.



भारतीय कुटुंबरचनेत परंपरेचा टेकू घेऊन प्रत्येक कामांची स्त्री-पुरुष अशी सोयीस्कर विभागणी केली गेलीय. मुलांचा जन्म-संगोपन, शिक्षणासारख्या जबाबदार्या स्त्रियांवर टाकल्या गेल्यात. कुटुंबासाठी अर्थार्जनापलिकडे काही कर्तव्यं असतात याची जाणीवही पुरुषांना फारशी दिसत नाही. मग अशा वेळी प्रसूतीदरम्यान, बायकोला मानसिक आधार वगैरेंसारख्या गोष्टी त्यांच्या गावीही नसतात. म्हणूनच 'तिथं आपलं काय काम' असा विचार करत लेबर रूमबाहेर येरझार्या घालण्यात धन्यता मानणारेच अधिक!

बाळाचा जन्म अनुभवणं ही जशी स्त्रीसाठी आनंदाची बाब तशीच ती पुरुषांसाठी. ही असायला हवी. म्हणूनच बाळाच्या जन्माच्या वेळी बाबाची उपस्थिती आवश्यक आहे. फक्त प्रसूत होणार्या महिलेला मानसिक आधार एवढाच त्यामागचा दृष्टिकोन नक्कीच नाही. मानवी जीवनात सहन करता येणार्या वेदनांमध्ये, प्रसूती वेदना या सर्वाधिक तीव्रतेचा असतात, असं शरीरविज्ञान सांगतं. म्हणूनच प्रसूती म्हणजे वेदनांची परिसीमाच. मग अशा प्राणांतिक वेदना सहन करून पत्नी आपल्या बाळाला कशी जन्म देते, प्रसूतीदरम्यान तिला कोणकोणत्या टप्प्यातून जावं लागतं, आत्यंतिक कळा सहन केल्यानंतरही बाळाच्या दर्शनानं आनंदून जाण्याचं बळ तिला कुठून मिळत असेल आणि या सगळ्यांमधून तरून जाऊन नव्या जोमानं ती बाळाच्या संगोपनात कशी गढून जाते असा प्रश्न प्रत्येक बाबाला पडायला हवा. या प्रश्नांची उत्तर शोधण्याचं कुतूहल जागं असावं.

'लेबर रूममधली पतीची उपस्थिती हा केवळ त्या जोडप्यापुरता मर्यादित खासगी मुद्दा' असं म्हणून टोलवण्याचा किंवा 'हे काय काहीतरी भलतंच' म्हणून नाकं मुरडण्याचाही विषय नक्कीच नाही. जन्मानंतरच्या बाळाच्या देखभालीमध्ये पुरुषांचं योगदान, त्यांच्या संगोपनातला सहभाग, अपत्य वाढवताना येणार्या इतर आनुषंगिक जबाबदार्या, त्यायोगे कराव्या लागणार्या तडजोडी आणि अपत्याच्या स्वभावाची जडणघडण यांच्यावर दूरगामी पण सकारात्मक परिणाम यामुळे घडून येऊ शकतो. अर्थात त्यासाठी त्या पद्धतीची सामाजिक पार्श्वभूमी तयार होणंही तितकंच गरजेचं आहे.



प्रसूतीदरम्यान पत्नी ज्या त्रासातून जाते याचा प्रत्यक्ष अनुभव जेव्हा पुरुष घेतील तेव्हा आपल्याला जन्म देणार्या आईकडे, आयुष्यभर सोबत करणार्या बायकोकडे, पाठिंब्याची अपेक्षा करणार्या बहिणीकडे, स्नेहभाव जपणार्या मैत्रिणीकडे, आणि सहकार्याची अपेक्षा करणार्या ऑफिसमधल्या महिला सहकार्यांकडे पाहण्याची त्याची दृष्टी कदाचित बदलू शकेल. शिवाय केवळ मुलगा हवा असण्याच्या हट्टापायी महिलांवर लादली जाणारी बाळंपतणं कमी होऊ शकतात. गर्भपातासाठी धरला जाणारा आग्रह कमी होऊ शकतो. प्रत्येक घरातल्या एका पुरुषाच्या मानसिकतेत जरी फरक पडला तर पुरुषी मानसिकता बदलणं ही खूप अवघड, अशक्य वाटणारी गोष्ट राहणार नाही.

आधुनिक युगात जगण्याच्या धडपडीत पती-पत्नींमध्ये वैचारिक, भावनिक, मानसिक मतभेद ही अटळ बाब आहे. दोघांमधला विविध पातळ्यांवरचा संघर्ष टाळता आला नाही तरी त्याची तीव्रता नक्कीच कमी करता येऊ शकते. मग त्याची सुरुवात बाळाच्या जन्माच्या सोहळ्यापासूनच का नको? असह्य वेदना पार करून संपूर्ण कुटुंबाला अक्षय्य आनंद देणार्या बायकोच्या नाजूक अवस्थेत पतीनं एक पाऊल पुढं यावं. कारण त्या काही क्षणांत परस्परांना दिलेल्या आधारामुळेच बाबा-आई-बाळ यांची एकमेकांसोबतची 'नाळ' घट्ट जोडली जाऊ शकते. शेवटी, 'बाबा' होत असतानाच्या आनंदात 'आई'पणाच्या कळाही वाटून घेता यायलाच हव्यात ना...

## मुबारक हो

### मृण्मयी रानडे

पहिलं मूल जन्माला येण्याची उत्सुकता, आनंद आईइतकाच बाबांनाही असता. 'च. अगदी प्रेम बोलण्यातनं व्यक्त न करू शकणारा पुरुष असला तरी कृतीतून हा आनंद, गर्भार बायकोविषयीची काळजी तो दाखवतच असतो. माणसं गावातली असोत वा शहरातली, जन्माचा हा क्षण अविस्मरणीयच. सिनेमांमधनं सतत पाहायला मिळणारी दृश्यं पडद्याइतकीच प्रत्यक्षातही घडत असतातच - लेबर रूम वा ऑपरेशन थिएटरच्या बाहेर येरझार्या घालणारे पुरुष, आत कळा देणारी बाई, एकमेकांकडे पाहणारे डॉक्टर व नर्स, आणि एकदम टचॅहा असं रडणं. 'मुबारक हो, लडकी हुई है,' किंवा 'मुबारक हो, आप पापा बन गये है,' असे संवाद.

मग अशा या ऐतिहासिक म्हणू शकतो अशा क्षणाचा साक्षीदार होणं किती रोमांचक आणि आनंदाचं आणि समाधान देणारं असेल ना? ज्या नवरा व बायकोमधल्या नात्यात अजून नवखेपणा आहे, खूप ऊब निर्माण नाही झालीये पण मुळात एकमेकांबद्दल आदर आणि जिव्हाळा आहे, तिथे जन्म देण्याच्या वेदनादायक प्रक्रियेच्या वेळी बायकोला धीर द्यायची संधी या नात्याला अधिक फुलवेल यात शंका वाटत नाही. प्रत्यक्ष कळांचा अनुभव पुरुष घेऊ शकत नसला तरी बायकोला काय सहन करावं लागतंय, याची खणखणीत जाणीव लेबर रूमच्या आत गेल्यावर त्याला होणारच. आणि त्यातूनच तिच्याबद्दल प्रेम, आदर वाटणं, साहजिकच म्हणावं लागेल. आपल्यापैकी बहुतेकांच्या आजीने किमान सातआठ मुलांना जन्म दिला आहे, तोही घरातल्या एका अंधार्या खोलीत, डॉक्टर नर्सशिवायच. त्या आजीने इतक्या वेळा हे कसं काय सहन केलं असेल, याचीही जाणीव पाहणार्याला होतेच.

‘त्यात काय पाहायचंय, तुला काय करायचंय पाहून,’ असं अनेकांना वाटतं कारण ते पाहू शकतो हेच आपल्या ध्यानीमनी नसतं. परंतु आता गेल्या १५-२० वर्षांत आपल्याकडच्या पुरुषांना हे माहित होऊ लागलंय, डॉक्टरांना नवराबायकोच्या संबंधांवर, तसेच गर्भनिरोधकांच्या वापरावर त्याचे सकारात्मक परिणाम दिसू लागलेत. मग हा सोहळा पाहायचं का टाळावं बरं कोणी? हं, तेवढं रक्त वगैरे पाहून चक्कर येणार नाही याची खात्री करून घ्या आत जायच्या आधी!

### अभिराम घड्याळपाटील, मुंबई

मुलीला जन्मताना प्रत्यक्ष बघता नाही आलं याचं आज थोडं वाईट वाटतं आहे. मात्र प्रामाणिकपणे सांगायचं तर हा विचार हा विषय समोर येईपर्यंत मला माहितसुद्धा नव्हता. आपल्या अपत्याचा जन्म होताना तिथे हजर राहता येतं हेच मला माहित नव्हतं. आज अशी संधी मिळाली तर नक्की आत जाईन. त्याची दोन कारणं. एक, बायकोला बरं वाटेल आणि त्यामुळे कदाचित तिच्या वेदना कमी होतील. दोन, आपला अंश जगात येताना बघायला कुणाला नाही आवडणार? तेव्हा मात्र मला हे काहीच माहिती नव्हतं. याचे कारण हेसुद्धा असावे की, मी फारच लहान वयात बाप झालो.

माझ्या मुलीच्या जन्माच्या वेळेला वेगळ्याच गोष्टी घडल्या. या विषयाशी त्याचा फारसा संबंध नाही. मात्र त्यातून मुलीकडे बघण्याचा आपल्या समाजाचा, विशेषतः उच्चभ्रू ब्राह्मण सरंजामी वर्गाचा दृष्टिकोन दिसतो. माझ्या बायकोच्या डॉक्टरांनी तिलासुद्धा मुलीचा जन्म झाल्यानंतर बराच वेळ तिला सांगितलंच नाही की मुलगी झाली आहे. आता या डॉक्टरसुद्धा बाईच आणि बायकोच्या घरच्या संबंधातल्या. तरी. ही त्यांना माझ्या घराकडे आणि एकंदर जमीनदारी वातावरणाकडे पाहून असं वाटलं असावं की यांना मुलगाच हवा असेल. आणि माझ्या घरच्यांच्या बाबतीत तो अंदाज खरासुद्धा असेल. मात्र ते सर्व तेवढ्यापुरतंच. त्यानंतर माझ्या घरी माझ्या मुलीला कुठल्याही अर्थाने वेगळी वागणूक मिळाली नाही.

### मानसिकता तयार करणं अत्यावश्यक

#### डॉ. स्वाती शिरडकर, औरंगाबाद

पतीनं लेबर रूममध्ये उपस्थित राहण्यासंदर्भात भारतात तसा काही कायदा वगैरे नाही. पण पतीनं हजर रहायला हवं असं माझं वैयक्तिक मत आहे. नवऱ्यांना त्या संदर्भात व्यवस्थित प्रशिक्षण देणं आवश्यक आहे. औरंगाबादेत गेल्या दहा वर्षांपासून मी, डॉ. चारुलता रोजेकर आणि काही स्त्रीरोगतज्ज्ञ मैत्रिणी मिळून अशा पद्धतीचं प्रशिक्षण देत आहोत. मात्र दुर्दैवाची बाब म्हणजे आजही याबाबतीत समाजात उदासीनता दिसून येते. अगदी सुशिक्षित वर्गातली मंडळीही यासाठी पुढे येत नाहीत. कारण समाजात याबद्दल असलेले पारंपरिक समज. त्यामुळे या प्रशिक्षणवर्गात गेल्या दहा वर्षांत पाच टक्के नवऱ्यांचीही उपस्थिती नाही.

डिलिव्हरीच्या वेळी संबंधित महिलेचा पती तिथं उपस्थित असणं ही स्वागताई बाब आहे. उलट सगळ्याच ठिकाणी प्रसूतीतज्ज्ञांनी याबद्दल कुटुंबातल्या सदस्यांना याबाबत कल्पना द्यावी. समुपदेशनाच्या माध्यमातून पतीची मानसिकता

तयार करावी. या बाजूचा आणखी एक फायदा असाही होऊ शकतो की, स्त्रियांचे आरोग्य सुधारण्यात या गोष्टीचा मोठा हातभार लागू शकतो. डिलिव्हरी दरम्यान महिलांना होणाऱ्या त्रासाची प्रत्यक्ष कल्पना आल्यास नियोजनाच्या साधनांचा वापर वाढू शकतो. स्त्रियांवर गर्भारपण लादलं जाणार नाही. शिवाय डॉक्टर— पेशंट रॅपो वाढेल, संवाद वाढेल. एकूणच बाळंतपणात पुरुषाचा जेवढा प्रत्यक्ष सहभाग वाढेल, तेवढी स्त्री आरोग्यात सुधारणा होईल असं मला वाटतं.

*(This is not the full article. Some sections have not been included due to space constraints of this publication).*



#### **MRINMAYEE RANADE**

Mrinmayee Ranade is editor of Madhurima, a weekly supplement for women, distributed with Dainik Divya Marathi, a Dainik Bhaskar Group newspaper. She has worked in a number of Marathi and English newspaper as a reporter and a sub editor for about 15 years. She has also worked as a fixer cum translator for various foreign journalists/authors/broadcasters. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Special Issue

## AADA SISUVU ANTA ALUSA

**T**his news feature exposes the discrimination against the girl child that is prevalent in the tribal communities of the Telengana State. The feature exposes how in the RangaReddy and Nizamabad Districts, days old unwanted girl babies are abandoned in the cradles that were placed by the ICDS department working in tandem with Women and Child Development Department.

A large number of social norms and values are behind the practice viz., desire for an heir, fear of not having support in old age and the low value placed on girls who are seen as 'Paraya Dhan', or other's property.

The women are often forced to abandon the child, who they carry full term, due to the pressure exerted on them by their husbands, in-laws and community. The plight of the women is as heart wrenching as that of the abandoned girls.

While ICDS workers see the Shishu Vihars or cradle baby initiative as a positive effort in saving girls whose life would otherwise be snuffed out immediately after birth through devious means due to the prevalent gender bias, the feature raises the question why more concrete steps are not being taken by the government to stop the practice?



### **BHANU KIRAN**

Bhanu Kiran is a Deputy News Editor in TV9 with a passion for sensitive feature presentations on societal issues. He handles the responsibility of the 8 30 pm news bulletin. He has to his credit hundreds of sensitively portrayed news stories. Recipient of LMAAGS 2014-15- Best Electronic News Report

# Advertising Awards

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## 2013-14



### **BEST ADVERTISEMENT- SERVICE| RK SWAMY BBDO**

#### **TVC | BANK OF INDIA – VEHICLE/CAR LOAN**

Bank of India, Vehicle/car loan ad uses the very common experience of dealing with arrogant and unresponsive auto drivers to promote its car loans. The ad portrays a competent and confident woman who empowers herself by buying a car availing a car loan. The way she settles scores with an auto wala in a fun way brings out a smile and makes it a highly watchable ad.

### **BEST ADVERTISEMENT – PRODUCT |LOWE LINTAS**

#### **TVC | HAVELLS –RESPECT WOMEN**

The series of Havell's ads – Respect Women, touch upon the innumerable ways in which women are treated as instrumental to men's needs, undermining their dignity and self- respect. The lack of sensitivity on the part of the men is what is highlighted in the ads, with women refusing to be treated as extensions of appliances. Considering the fact that the target group for the products is women, such an approach could have been disastrous; yet the ads manage to successfully project the brand as one that respects and values women as individuals.

### **BEST BRAND PROMOTION | MC CANN ERICKSON**

#### **TVC | NESTLE-SHARE YOUR GOODNESS**

Nestle's Brand Promotion Ad – '*Share Your Goodness*', touches the hearts of the viewers with a very sensitive portrayal of the girl child. While the parents are shown adopting a girl child, the portrayal of the girl breaks many stereotypes – she climbs trees, plays with worms and is a fun loving child who picks up toffees from the kitchen shelf. The spontaneity and carefreeness of the girl child endears her not just to her new brother but to the viewers as well.



**BEST ADVERTISEMENT –SERVICE- LOWE LINTAS**

**TVC | BHARAT MATRIMONY – CAREER**

Bharat Matrimony ad - 'Career', asserts the right of women to work. The ad subtly challenges the middle class value that a woman need not work if her husband is able to provide for her well, where a woman's work is seen as a means to supplement family income and not as a need for self- fulfillment. By showing the couple accepting the aspirations of the woman and the changes that it entail in the household duties in a matter of fact manner, the ad avoids glorifying the man and burdening the woman with guilt.

**BEST ADVERTISEMENT – SERVICE | DRAFTUCB ULKA**

**TVC | TATA DOCOMO**

Tata Docomo Ad- Open Up-Lizard, challenges a common stereotype through a very short, funny and humorous film. By showing a boy and then a man running out of the bathroom screaming on sighting a lizard on the wall, the ad mocks the perception that men and boys are brave and it is only women who get scared by lizards, cockroaches etc.

**BEST ADVERTISEMENT --PRODUCT | SOHO SQUARE**

**TVC | PC JEWELLERS**

PC Jewellers ad – Working Woman, challenges the dominant perception that a bread winner is always a man and projects a confident, successful and charming woman who asserts her identity as the woman of the house. The fact that the man is shown as not being the provider and comfortable about it, is itself refreshing.



## **ADVERTISEMENT – PRODUCT | FAMOUS INNOVATION**

### **TVC | RAYMONDS - BEING THERE**

The Raymond's Ad – Being there, portrays a working couple with the woman being torn between her official commitments and concern for her child. The ad breaks the stereotype by making the man take the initiative to stay back at home with the child while the woman goes to office. Shot with no dialogues, the film redefines the complete man as one who shares the parental responsibilities and is also sensitive to the woman's work commitments.

## **LAADLI GRAND PRIX OGILVY AND MATHER**

### **TVC | TITAN RAGA – TUM NAHI BADLE**

The Titan Raga ad – Tum Nahi Badle, touches upon the deep rooted mindset that views work and career as man's prerogative and woman's work and career being secondary. The woman is shown as being assertive and independent enough to exercise her choice to walkout of a marriage where her aspirations were not being respected. Yet, her character is etched sensitively, depicting her as being confident and unapologetic about her choice. The creative team has managed to tell a great story in short time and established the identity of the brand with women with agency and choice.



## 2014-15



### GRAND PRIX | BBDO INDIA

#### TVC | ARIEL – SHARE THE LOAD

This powerful *'Share the Load'* ad features a man apologizing to his daughter for failing to challenge patriarchal attitudes regarding household work. By raising a mirror to society, the ad seeks a better world where there's equality within the household, with men and women sharing the household chores. It is based on the insight that children learn what they see and parents end up passing down gender role stereotypes from one generation to the next. The ad acts like an eye-opener for all fathers and makes them realize that it is never too late to make a beginning.

### GAME CHANGER AWARD | LOWE LINTAS

#### TVC | HAVELLS – WINDS OF CHANGE

The series of ads for Havells created by Lowe Lintas have consistently presented gender sensitive themes questioning many patriarchal attitudes and practices. The *"Winds of Change"* or *"Hava Badlegi"* campaign was started three years ago to build a brand that believes in positive social change. The campaign has conveyed the message that a small change in our thought process can contribute to a much bigger and better change in society at large.

### BEST ADVERTISEMENT | BRAND PROMOTION | CREATIVE LAND ASIA

#### TVC | INDIAN EXPRESS – THE INTELLIGENT INDIAN

The ad plays on the theme *'The Newspaper is dead'*, to emphasize that the brand is more than a 'newspaper'. It builds the brand into one which is

speaking to and for the Intelligent Indian and shows an equal representation of men and women as the **"Intelligent Indian"**. Indian Express had earlier built its brand heritage with its campaign on Journalism of Courage. The new ad strengthens the perception of courage and successfully connects it with the intelligent reader while giving due recognition to the women readers.

#### **BEST ADVERTISEMENT |CAMPAIGN | OGILVY & MATHER**

##### **TVC | ANOUK BY MYNTRA – BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL**

This campaign is a series of five ads exemplifying how a woman can voice her thoughts and opinions, stand-up for herself, express her individual identity and build her own future. Ethnic wear is often seen as a safe option for portly, old fashioned and unattractive Indian women to 'hide' behind. The ad presents the Anouk range of contemporary and modern ethnic apparel for women as one that makes them look bold, vibrant, stylish and edgy.

#### **BEST ADVERTISEMENT |PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT | OGILVY & MATHER**

##### **TVC | BREAKTHROUGH – SHARE YOUR STORY WITH YOUR SON**

The video 'Share Your Story With Your Son' by Delhi-based NGO 'Breakthrough' is premised on the fact that 40 per cent men believe that teasing is harmless fun and doesn't constitute sexual harassment. It depicts a mother sharing her experience of sexual harassment in the street with her teenage son, driving home the point how frustrating, annoying and harassing it is. The ad thus helps young adults understand the so called harmless teasing as an act of violence. It thus promotes a dialogue and open discussion in families on the issue of sexual harassment on streets.



**BEST ADVERTISEMENT | PRODUCT | OGILVY & MATHER**

**TVC | TITAN RAGA – BREAK THE BIAS**

The 'Break the Bias' ad is a subtle yet powerful narrative about the way the world looks at a woman's success, which is often viewed as being determined by her ability to influence her male bosses through her charm and guile. It drives home the point that our thoughts are clouded by preconceived notions and gender biases, and calls for change.

**BEST SHORT FILM | DENTSU MARCOM, A DENTSU AEGIS NETWORK COMPANY**

**OMRON HEALTHCARE – TUMHARI AMMA**

The short film 'Tumhari Amma' has touched upon a couple of social issues while branding its BP monitor very subtly. The focus is on the central theme – how young people need to take care of their aging parents. More importantly, 'Tumhari Amma' broaches an important social issue that of 'remarriage' of a single parent – the mother. In a society that discriminates against widowed women, Omron's bold film encourages remarriage lovingly, through a caring daughter.

**JURY APPRECIATION CERTIFICATE | TVC | BBDO INDIA**

**PARAMPARA - OMELETTE MASALA**

The Parampara Omelette Masala ad, part of their 'Men in Kitchen' series, challenges the existing stereotype of women doing all the cooking at home. While highlighting the ease of cooking with the masala, it encourages men to step into the kitchen. So, now even men can cook, it says. In a humorous, lighthearted way, the ad questions traditional thinking and starts a new 'Parampara', a new tradition.

**JURY APPRECIATION CERTIFICATE | TVC | MEDIA – DDB MUDRA GROUP**

**SALUTE THE HOMEMAKER**

The ad pays tribute to all the women who stay at home and work round-the clock for their families. It is based on the common perception of a homemaker having an easy job to do, without involving much effort. It deals with the common question, "What did you do the whole day?" which is usually thrown at the home maker, belittling her work. The ad shows the results when a homemaker decides to take a break- a home in total disarray.

**2015-16**

**GRAND PRIX | PUBLICIS**

**TVC | VICKS – GENERATIONS OF CARE**

This powerful 'Generations of care' advertisement features the real story of a trans-woman adopting an orphan and raising her alone against the odds. It



shows a relatable relationship between mother and daughter; the mother's aspirations for the child and the child's dreams for her mother. Through the voice of the child, the ad questions the lack of equality in her mother's life and by extension the life of transpersons and the discrimination that they face.

**GAME CHANGER | OGILVY & MATHER**

**TVC | STAR INDIA – NAYI SOCH**

StarTV's campaign 'Nayi Soch' challenges the deep seated gender perceptions through a series of ads. One of the ads addresses the prejudice that girls cannot further the business and property interests of the father - which is one of the major reasons for son preference in families. The ad tells the story of a proud father whose business expands thanks to the efforts of his two net savvy daughters managing the marketing of his sweets. The highlight of the ad is the surprising revelation of the name of the business "Gurdeep Singh and Daughters" which leaves the viewers wondering "Yes, why not!!".



## **BRAND PROMOTION | FAMOUS INNOVATIONS**

### **TVC | RAYMOND – FATHER’S DAY**

This ad which was released on Father’s day celebrates the single mother who carries the responsibility of a father and a mother towards her child. Through a small and heartwarming gift, the child in the ad acknowledges the dual role played by her single mother. The ad subtly challenges the gendering of parenting roles while taking forward the message of the brand – A Complete Man.

## **CORPORATE – CSR | FAMOUS INNOVATIONS**

### **TVC | NESTLE – PROJECT NANHI KALI – #EDUCATETHEGIRLCHILD**

The Nanihi Kali ad for promoting girls education is an example of powerful communication that shocks and stuns the viewers with the gravity of its messaging. The act of the young girl cutting her hair short not only reflects the child’s perception of the gender inequality and injustice but also voices the fear of aspirations not being fulfilled. The ad, thus, draws our attention to the fact that girls’ education is secondary to education of boys in our country and demands the viewers to take responsibility in changing the prevalent scenario.

## **BRAND ACTIVATION | OGLIVY & MATHER**

### **TVC | BROOKE BOND – TASTE OF TOGETHERNESS**

Through an on ground campaign ‘The Taste of Togetherness’, Brooke Bond urges viewers to see the similarities and put aside their difference over a cup of tea. A conversation transpires between a sex worker and a female insurance agent in the installation of a tea stall at a railway station which demonstrates the similarities between the two women. The insurance agent honestly reveals her discomfort to be seated across a sex worker, while the sex worker accepts this prejudice as given. The ad holds up a mirror to society and demands that we take a closer look at our own prejudices and connect to those around us irrespective of their backgrounds.

## **LIFESTYLE | CREATIVE LAND ASIA**

### **TVC | BENETTON INDIA – UNITED BY HALF**

‘United by Half’ presents a sequence of different women in different roles, ages, and equations leading life with just one message – equality. Be it the workplace, sports, public spaces, home or shopping malls, women want to be treated equally, receive equal pay and enjoy equal rights. The ad sends out this message strongly without reducing women’s position to better halves or other halves. It furthers Benetton’s campaign for women by voicing their thoughts on equality.

**JURY APPRECIATION CERTIFICATE | SAATCHI AND SAATCHI**

**TVC | PAMPERS – IT TAKES TWO**

'It takes two' ad is a subtle yet powerful narrative about inclusive parenting. It urges for the need of the involvement of fathers in child rearing process for a healthy upbringing of the child. Pampers furthers its message of happy families through the ad and breaks through the clutter of noisy narrative of the mothers as sole nurturers in the family.

**JURY APPRECIATION CERTIFICATE | CELLAR DOOR FILMS**

**TVC | URBAN CLAP – THESE FOUR WOMEN TOOK LESS TRODDEN PATHS**

This contemporary and insightful ad features four women who have chosen less trodden paths. It gives a message of strength, endurance and wit from the women who take on tasks which are assigned mostly to men like mechanics, bus drivers, bouncers and fitness instructors. The ad while challenging stereotypes of work assigned to a gender delivers a powerful message that the equations between men and women should not be based on dependence and need but on desire and want.

## Other Category Awards



## FILMS



**2013-14**

### **QUEEN**

Queen directed by Vikas Behal, was a tale, simply told, with characters that are real and possible to identify with. Deftly, yet with a light touch, it dealt with the troubled issues (especially in our society) of womens' independence, freedom and most importantly, of self respect. It was reassuring to see that audiences were able to identify with Rani, the main character. They comfortably journey with her as she retains her space and identity and moves gently from pain and loss to acceptance and confidence. The film worked as a whole as well, with good characterizations and performances.

**2014-15**

### **DUM LAGA KE HAISHA**

*Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, directed by Sharat Katariya, had an unusual woman character as the protagonist. Instead of showing the woman as a weak person with low self esteem due to her weight, the film took a leap forward by showing her as a bold and confident person with grit and verve, a girl who made strong decisions and was in charge of her life. She demonstrated that a woman can feel comfortable and be at ease with herself as she is and need not feel pressurized to fit into conventional or patriarchal ideas of beauty.

### **MARGARITA WITH A STRAW**

*Margarita with a Straw*, directed by Shonali Bose, was a path breaking movie in many respects. Not only did it handle issues a disabled woman faces in her



life, it also dared to show her as a sexual being with unusual sexual preferences. The movie broke through common misconceptions about disability and showed the protagonist as a talented musician who pursues her choices and lives an active, fulfilling life with appropriate support. The movie ends on a positive note showing Margarita discovering her independence and ability to live life on her own terms.

### **ALIGARH**

*Aligarh*, directed by Hansal Mehta, is based on the life of Dr Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras who taught at Aligarh Muslim University. He was sacked from his position of Reader and Chair of Modern Indian Languages, on charges of homosexuality. The film is a sensitive portrayal of a controversial real-life court case involving the victimization of a gay person. It courageously stood for gay rights and showed the cruelty meted to this group by a homophobic Indian society. It is a sad reflection of our society that prides itself on being a democracy but refuses to give people their right to live and love. The film shows the coming of age of modern Indian cinema, particularly with regard to the LGBT Community.

### **2015-16**

#### **NIL BATTEY SANNATA**

Nil Battey Sannata, sensitively tells the story of the conflict between a single working mother from lower economic strata and her adolescent and defiant daughter. It brings out the conflict between the despair of the daughter who sees no value in education and no hope for her future except to be a maid like her mother and the aspiration of the mother who sees hope for her daughter's upward mobility in education. It is an inspiring story of a mother teaching her daughter to dream, aspire and achieve.

#### **PARCHED**

Parched is the story of the journey of three women from despair to freedom. In the parched lands of a desert they long for meaningful relationships with the men in their lives, who fill their lives with only violence of the most heinous kind. The perverted and skewed perceptions of masculinity, the fragility of male egos and the violence perpetrated by men is starkly contrasted with the warm friendship and bonding between the women which makes them acknowledge and explore their own desires and sexuality, ultimately exercising their agency and choice to chart their own path.

# THEATRE

2013-14

## SMITA BHARTI | JUG JUG JIYO

Jug Jug Jiyo, a play in Hinglish, directed by Smita Bharti, unravels the lives of two women across three decades, who are living and sharing a house in a small town. The play begins with the visit of their children who are in a live in relationship in Mumbai to their home town to meet their parents. This leads to a small confrontation and lays bare the hidden past of the two women until there is nothing left to lay bare. The story intimately journeys through hard hitting topics of social stigma for unmarried and pregnant women, marital rape, female foeticide and infanticide, trafficking and illegal surrogacy. JUG JUG JIYO is an entertaining yet socially relevant play that compels us to think of the many messages it wants to deliver. It ends with love and hope that change is possible

2014-15

## THE PATCHWORKS ENSEMBLE | 'ILA'



Ila' by The Patchworks Ensemble is directed by accomplished theatre artists. The play looks at gender, its related myths as well as the dilemmas. The story is about a king who ventures into an enchanted forest and is transformed by a spell. As the moon waxes and wanes so does Ila, turning from man to woman and back to man. With ever-changing landscapes - sometimes in ancient land and sometimes in the local trains of Mumbai - and leaps in time, this chorus takes the audience through a provocative, playful and exciting journey that questions what it means to "be a woman/man and everything in between".

2015-16



**FAEZEH JALALI | SHIKHANDI-THE STORY OF THE IN-BETWEENS**

This play is a comic, tongue-in-cheek, retelling of the story of Shikhandi. Mixing the traditional with the contemporary, the grandeur of Indian storytelling and contemporary English verse, it questions gender, sexuality, masculinity, femininity, and everything in between. The unique conversational style of the play motivates the audience to examine their own biases and realize the futility of the labels attached by the society.

## INNOVATIVE CAMPAIGN

### COMIC BOOK | **MENSTRUPEDIA**

Menstrupedia is a fun guide to menstruation or “periods” as they are commonly called, which helps girls and women to stay healthy and active during their periods. It provides informative and entertaining content in a comic book format. It is aimed at spreading awareness about menstruation and clarifying myths around the subject.

### E-MAGAZINE | **OUT OF PRINT**

Curated by Indira Chandrasekhar, the editor Out of Print published an entire issue on sexual violence to illustrate its pervasiveness in different situations and contexts, how it influences all our lives, how it interacts with existing inequities, how it is used as a weapon, and how it is often erased out of public debate. In this series women got an opportunity to speak and be heard with nothing being out of bounds – whether its abortion, whores, wombs or rapes.

### AHMEDABAD MIRROR | **ART O’NAMA, SHADES OF WOMEN**

Ahmedabad Mirror's *Art o' Nama, Shades of Women* was a campaign that invited several artists – men and women – to depict women in different moods. The book, a collection of the art works, captures the spirit of the women of Amdavad on paper what established artists depicted on canvas. Each page speaks volumes about the courage of women - speaking out against violence, against pain and ignorance and against illiteracy. The art work also showcases women's inhibitions, insecurities and suffering through an artist's brush. It helps one understand how artists interpret emotion and connect with everyday life creatively.

# BOOK

2013-14

**DR SWATI TIWARI**

***SAWAAL AAJ BHI ZINDA HAI***

Dr. Swati Tiwari, in her book, "Sawaal Aaj Bhi Zinda Hai" despairs that the Bhopal Gas Disaster is not just a tragedy for Bhopal but for the entire Nation. In this book, Dr. Swati chronicles the lives of women who have been and continue to be worst hit. It documented the lives of women survivors who have lost everything and continue to face a never-ending struggle. It narrates stories of how the women have picked up their lives in the aftermath of the tragedy. It highlights the irony where a medical card holds more importance than a ration card, because food is needed every month whereas medicines are needed every other day.

2014-15

**ROHINI MOHAN**

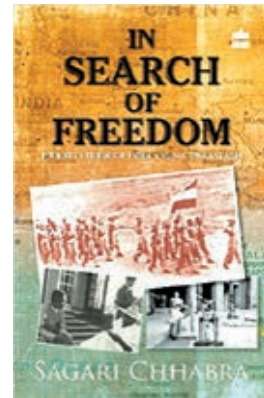
***THE SEASONS OF TROUBLE***

Rohini Mohan's book is a haunting and wistful recount of one of Asia's most searing wars: the Sri Lanka civil war. Written with heart, brains and sheer grit, it puts a human face to the war that has been etched into our consciousness through its two female protagonists, Indra and Mugil, and one male protagonist, Sarva. Rohini is a gifted writer who has the unique ability to weave story telling into a non-fiction narrative.

**SAGARI CHHABRA**

***IN SEARCH OF FREEDOM***

In Search of Freedom takes us back to the pre-independence era and unpeels stories of women freedom fighters from India to South Asia, who heeded the call of a unique moment in history. Captured like an oral history project it brings alive the voices of women, who joined the struggle, either with the blessings of their families or without it. Each woman leads the author to another survivor, jumping from memory to history to the present. This web of connected stories weaves a narrative of valor, determination and the will to submit to a larger ideal and a bigger goal.



## 2015-16

**ESSAR BATOOL, IRFAH BUTT, SAMREENA MUSHTAQ, MUNAZA RASHID, NATASHA RATHER**

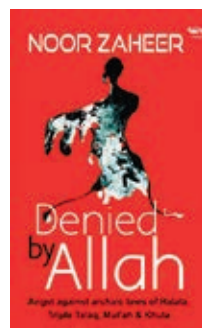
### **DO YOU REMEMBER KUNAN POSHPORA?**

In 1991, a group of soldiers and officers of the Indian Army pushed their way into two villages in Kashmir, seeking out militants assumed to be hiding there. They pulled the men out of their homes and subjected many to torture, and the women to rape. According to village accounts, as many as 31 women were raped. Twenty-one years later, in the aftermath of the rape and murder of a young medical student in Delhi, a group of young women in Kashmir were inspired to re-open the Kunan-Poshpura case, to revisit their history and to look at what had happened to the survivors of the 1991 mass rape. Through personal accounts of their journey, this book examines questions of justice, of stigma, of the responsibility of the state, and of the long-term impact of trauma.

**NOOR ZAHEER**

### **DENIED BY ALLAH**

'Denied by Allah' is a book that mirrors stories of women for whom even God does not seem to have mercy – of women who face the indignity of having to sleep with a stranger just to return to a husband who has pronounced triple talaq in a fit of anger; of women who have to run from pillar to post to end a marriage by begging for Khula, of women surviving Mut'ah (pleasure), a temporary marriage, equivalent to prostitution. This book discusses medieval laws irrelevant in the 21st century, sexist bias that pass for conventions, life decisions made only by men which have denied the other half basic respect and protection, dignity and humaneness, often in the name of religion.



**APARNA JAIN**

### **OWN IT**

Own It tells women's stories: the ugly, the happy, the rarely discussed, the unacknowledged, the whispered, the denied. Close to two hundred Indian women leaders across industries discuss the challenges they face in the Indian workplace and at home. Heads of companies, human resource directors and senior managers talk about issues like pay parity, harassment, promotion and maternity policies. Why is the workplace skewed against women and what are their own demons that keep them from breaking the glass ceiling? Thought-provoking and controversial, Own It takes the challenges that confront

women in the workplace head-on – without discounting the complexities of being a woman in an Indian home.

### **VOLGA**

#### **LIBERATION OF SITA**

The Liberation of Sita, written by the Telugu writer Volga and translated into English by T. Vijay Kumar and C. Vijayasree, tells of a very different heroine from that of Valmiki's and Rama's Ramayana. It traces individual stories of Surpanaka, Ahalya and other women characters in Ramayana that don't have a prominent role in the epic. This story shows strong female friendship and evolution of characters over a period of time. It shows Sita learning and embedding strength from other women.

### **SHARANYA MANNIVANAN**

#### **THE HIGH PRIESTESS NEVER MARRIES**

High Priestess Never Marries a collection of short stories looks at strong female characters that find salvation within themselves. It shows them struggling but also portrays them finding peace in a strong inner voice. The book is personal and relatable to several single women of our generation. Women would find solace in seeing other women overcoming hurdles and attaining a place in society that is comfortable in their own skin.

# *Laadli Special Awards*

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## **LAADLI VOICE OF THE CENTURY 2013-14**

### **LATA MANGESHKAR**



Lata Mangeshkar fondly known as Didi has been weaving her musical magic for over seven decades. Her voice has been the most recorded voice in history – 30,000 songs in 36 Indian languages. Indian music is synonymous with Lataji's name. She has single handedly, with her music, helped the global reach of Bollywood. Her singing "Ae mere watan ke logon" was so heart rending that it is said to have moved Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to tears and there is no Republic

Day or Independence Day when her patriotic songs are not played and they still evoke the same response in people. In 2001, Lata Mangeshkar was awarded Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor.

## **LAADLI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

### **(2014-15)**

### **JEANNIE NAOROJI**



Jeannie Naoroji whose name is synonymous in India with fashion design and choreography was conferred this Award for putting the costumes and jewelry of this great and diverse land onto the world stage; for marrying theatre and style; for melding a Bollywood approach with the traditional, and her commercial acumen.

She started the India-on-Show Production Unit, way back in 1965, when fashion choreography was unheard of in India. This Unit, under Jeannie's leadership, produced over 700 different shows with more than 4500 presentations all over the world and pioneered month-long, travelling Trade shows in Russia, New Delhi and Germany.

Over a career spanning four decades, Jeannie, along with her business partner, trained many master tailors, choreographers, set designers, musicians, a huge team of people that design and run fashion shows.

## **LAADLI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2014-15**

### **VAASANTHI**



Vaasanthi is an accomplished and acclaimed writer and journalist who has been writing for more than 50 years on human rights, gender issues and communal harmony. Her books have been translated into other languages, both Indian and European, and won many Awards. Two of her books have been made into films. She has published 60 books including novels, six short story collections, six volumes of journalistic articles and four travelogues.

## **LAADLI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2014-15**

### **DR NIRUPAMA BARGOHAIN**



Nirupama Bargohain is one of the most prolific writers in Assam. She has authored more than 40 novels, 18 short story collections, 3 memoirs, 4 travelogues, 3 biographies, 3 children's works and 14 essay collections. In a life marked by struggles of various kinds, Nirupama has gathered experience from working at different

careers such as teaching, journalism, without compromising with her principles for the sake of furthering these careers. Her writings are a deep and honest engagement with the most vital social issues of her times and she has achieved a rare blend of social commitment and artistic elevation in her works.

## **LAADLI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD (2015-16)**



Kamla Bhasin is known for simplifying, yet not diluting, complex issues of gender, patriarchy, violence and oppression of different kinds. Her ability to blend art, music, dance and her kindred spirit into activism is well known across South Asia and has won her many praises. She has brought together several organisations from

neighbouring countries, even conflict ridden countries, to bridge a solidarity among feminists across borders. Feminists, both young and old, turn to Kamla for her support and her wisdom from having engaged with gender, inequality and injustice for several years. Her wit and clarity of thought are a beacon of hope for many across the subcontinent.

Through a career spanning five decades, Kamla has reached out to thousands of young people, activists, artists, feminists and spread her message of equality. She was among the first to articulate the harmful nature of patriarchy on men; while simultaneously leading the discourse on violence against women and the need for solidarity across genders to end violence.

Cause Partner:



### **ABOUT COLORS:**

'COLORS' is Viacom18's flagship brand in the entertainment space in India. A combination of 'emotions' and 'variety', COLORS, launched on 21st July 2008, offers an entire spectrum of emotions to its viewers. From Fiction Shows to Format shows to Reality shows to Blockbuster Movies – the basket contains all 'Jazbaat Ke Rang'. 'COLORS' is dedicated to promoting 'Cohesive viewing', through programmes like Thapki...Pyaar Ki, Devanshi, Sasural SimarKa, Shakti...Astivta Ke Ehsaas Kii, Udann, Swaragini, Kasam...Tere Pyaar Ki, Kawach...Kaali Shaktiyon Se, Jhalak Dikhla Jaa, Comedy Nights Bachao Taaza, Naagin 2, Bigg Boss 10, Dil Se Dil Tak, Karmphal Data Shani and Rising Star, amongst others.

### **About 'VIACOM 18':**

Viacom 18 Media Pvt. Ltd. is one of India's fastest growing entertainment networks and a house of iconic brands that offers multi-platform, multi-generational and multicultural brand experiences. A joint venture of Viacom Inc. and the Network18 Group, Viacom18 defines entertainment in India by touching people on air, online, on ground, in shop and through its cinema.

# Our Jury

## 2013-16

<b>Abdus Salam Asim</b>	: Writer, Editor
<b>Amy Fernandes</b>	: Media Professional
<b>Amita Pitre</b>	: Working on Violence against Women at TISS
<b>Amrita Chowdhury</b>	: Author, Innovator and Business Strategist
<b>Anish Trivedi</b>	: Media Professional , Actor, Writer,TV Anchor
<b>Anuja Gulati</b>	: State Programme Coordinator, UNFPA
<b>Anuradha Parikh</b>	: Filmmaker and Architect and Founder of G5A
<b>Anuradha Sengupta</b>	Broadcast Journalist/anchor and Producer and Founder of G5A foundation for Contemporary Culture
<b>Anuradha Sarma</b>	
<b>Pujari</b>	: Editor
<b>Anurita Pathak</b>	
<b>Hazarika</b>	: Womens Rights Activist
<b>Ashok Sajjanhar</b>	: IFS Officer, Writer
<b>Ayaz memon</b>	: Journalist
<b>Azhagiya Periyavan</b>	: Writer and Journalist
<b>Banesh.M.S</b>	: Executive Editor Sakhi TV
<b>Bhagwan Das</b>	: Advertising Professional
<b>Bharathi.K.</b>	: Writer, Associate Professor
<b>Chaya Ratan</b>	: IAS Officer
<b>Chinmayee Joshi</b>	: Gender Consultant
<b>Danny</b>	: Journalist, Writer, Filmmaker, Literary Critic
<b>Davindra Kaur Uppal</b>	: Academician, Researcher, Script Writer, Theatre Professional
<b>Debendranath Tamuly</b>	: Media Professional
<b>Deepa Gahlot</b>	: Author, Scriptwriter, Theatre and Film Critic
<b>Deepa Sahi</b>	: Screenplay Writer,Producer,Actor and Media Entrepreneur
<b>Devi.P.A.</b>	: Social Activist
<b>Dilip Dsouza</b>	: Writer , Journalist
<b>Divakar. V. J. M.</b>	: Senior Journalist
<b>Dr Alarmelu Rishi</b>	: Academician,Writer
<b>Dr Anand Pradhan</b>	: Academician
<b>Dr Anamika</b>	: Poet, Novelist,Translator
<b>Dr Ameer Yajnik</b>	: Author, Lawyer working on womens rights
<b>Dr Ampady</b>	: IAS Officer,Script Writer, News Editor
<b>Dr Asha Devi.M.S.</b>	: Literary and Cultural Theoretician
<b>Dr Bandana Bhuyan</b>	: Regional Director NIPCCD Guwahati
<b>Dr Bharathi.K.</b>	: Academician and Writer

<b>Dr Daya Krishan Mangal</b>	:	State Coordinator UNFPA
<b>Dr Drashti Patel</b>	:	Media Consultant, Teacher and Writer
<b>Dr Gaurang Jani</b>	:	Academician
<b>Dr Gayathri.N</b>	:	Feminist Writer and Activist
<b>Dr Ishwar Singh Dost</b>	:	Academician and Journalist
<b>Dr Krishnaswamy.S.</b>	:	Writer, Producer, Director and Founder of Krishnaswamy Associates
<b>Dr Manjari Thakoor</b>	:	Deputy Curator, NGMA
<b>Dr Mrunalini.C.</b>	:	Academician, Media Personality
<b>Dr Prasad Murty</b>	:	Poet and Senior Journalist
<b>Dr Preeti Shah</b>	:	Professor, HOD, Writer
<b>Dr Rama</b>	:	Academician, Author
<b>Dr Ranjana Kumari</b>	:	Social Activist working on womens Issues
<b>Dr Sharada Jain</b>	:	Educationist
<b>Dr Sonal Ratilal Pandya</b>	:	HOD of Communication, Journalism & Public Relations Gujarat University.
<b>Dr Tapati Baruah</b>		
<b>Kashyap</b>	:	Writer
<b>Geetha Nazeer</b>	:	Founder of Trivandrum Womens Writers Forum
<b>Geeta Luthra</b>	:	Senior Advocate, Trustee at Manushi
<b>Geeta Ramaseshan</b>	:	Senior Lawyer
<b>Girish Upadhyaya</b>	:	Journalist, Media Expert
<b>Gita Rani Bhattacharya</b>	:	State Prog Officer Mahila Samakhya, Assam
<b>Goparaju Sudha</b>	:	Writer and Poet
<b>Gouri Choudhury</b>	:	Founder of Saheli
<b>Gurbir Singh</b>	:	Journalist
<b>Harekrishna Deka</b>	:	Writer
<b>Indira Misra</b>	:	IAS Officer, Author, Editor, Journalist
<b>Indira Jaising</b>	:	Director of Lawyers Collective Padmashri Awardee
<b>Ira Jha</b>	:	Media Consultant
<b>Jahnavee Khound</b>	:	Editor
<b>Jinka Nagaraju</b>	:	Senior Journalist, Editor
<b>Junu Borah</b>	:	Womens Rights Activist, Writer
<b>Jyoti Gade</b>	:	Professional working on Gender Issues
<b>Kalpna Sharma</b>	:	Journalist, Author
<b>Kanchan Kaur</b>	:	Senior Journalist
<b>Kiran Khalap</b>	:	Author
<b>Krishna Menon</b>	:	Academician, Writer

<b>Kumar Ketkar</b>	: Editor, Senior Journalist
<b>Kuppili Padma</b>	: Writer and Journalist
<b>Lalita Iyer</b>	: Senior Journalist
<b>Lalitha Kumari</b>	
<b>Popuri-Volga</b>	: Writer
<b>Lalrinawmi Ralte</b>	: Author and Theologian
<b>Malabika Patel</b>	: Writer and Poet
<b>Malti Mehta</b>	: Media & Communication Expert
<b>Manasi .V.</b>	: writer
<b>Manipadma Jena</b>	: Senior Journalist
<b>Manjul Bajaj</b>	: Writer
<b>Manjula Pradeep</b>	: Social Activist
<b>Meghna Pant</b>	: Author,Journalist and TEDx speaker
<b>Meenaxi Shukla</b>	: Co-Founder CHETNA (Retd)
<b>Mita Kapur</b>	: Founder of SIYAH!, Literary Agent
<b>Mita Deka</b>	: Professor, Chief Editor
<b>Mark Manuel</b>	: Journalist, Editor , Writer
<b>Mohammed Khan</b>	: Advertising Professional
<b>Monica Tata</b>	: Advertising Professional
<b>Monica Wahi</b>	: Childrens Media Specialist
<b>Munmun Ghosh</b>	: Writer and Editor CRISIL Ltd
<b>Nalini Singh</b>	: Television Professional
<b>Namrata Roy Ghose</b>	: Advertising Professional,Writer
<b>Nandana Dutta</b>	: Professor,Writer
<b>Nandini Sardesai</b>	: Professor and Activist
<b>Neelam Kulshreshtha</b>	: Journalist and Feminist Writer
<b>Neeru Nanda</b>	: Retd IAS Official
<b>Pallavi Patel</b>	: Co-Founder & Director CHETNA
<b>Pamela Phillipose</b>	: Senior Journalist and Editor at WFS
<b>Pooh Sayani</b>	: Producer and Director
<b>Pooja P Vardhan</b>	: IIS officer, Doordarshan Professional
<b>Pralayan</b>	: Theatre Personality, Journalist
<b>Pragati Bankhele</b>	: Copy Editor, Senior Journalist
<b>Pragya Paliwal Gaur</b>	: Chief Of Media Doordarshan , Jaipur
<b>Prakash. N. Shah</b>	: Senior Journalist and Editor
<b>Pratima Joshi</b>	: Principal Correspondent at Maharashtra Times, Writer
<b>Prema Malini Vanam</b>	: Input Editor at TV5
<b>Prof Afaq Ahmad</b>	: Writer
<b>Prof Anees Sultana</b>	: Writer and Poet
<b>Prof Prabha Kalvimani</b>	: Educationist, Social activist, Human Rights Activist
<b>Prof Saraswathy</b>	: Academician and Womens Rights Activist
<b>Prof Uma Maheshwari</b>	: Academician

<b>Prof Vibhuti Patel</b>	: Academician, Gender Studies Specialist
<b>Pushpendra Pal Singh</b>	: Media Educator, Writer
<b>Raakhee Bakshi</b>	: Broadcasting Professional, Social Entrepreneur
<b>Raja Ramesh. P</b>	: Visual Media Professional
<b>Rajni Bakshi</b>	: Author
<b>Rama. S</b>	: Chief Sub Editor , SAKSHI
<b>Ramesh Nayyar</b>	: Senior Journalist, Editor, Author
<b>Ramesh Narayan</b>	: Advertising Professional
<b>Reema Gehi</b>	: Journalist
<b>Renuka Shahane</b>	: Actress
<b>Rinki Roy</b>	
<b>Bhattacharya</b>	: Film, Art, Theatre Critic
<b>Roopa Barua</b>	: Independent Film Maker
<b>Sachidanand Joshi</b>	: Author, Theatre Personality, Professor, Vice Chancellor
<b>Sagarika Ghose</b>	: Senior Journalist, Editor
<b>Sajid Rizwi</b>	: Poet, Producer and Director of Plays
<b>Samanya</b>	: Writer
<b>Sameera Khan</b>	: Journalist , Author and Researcher
<b>Sampad Mahapatra</b>	: Film and Documentary Director, Editor
<b>Samudra Gupta</b>	
<b>Kashyap</b>	: Assistant editor, Senior Journalist
<b>Sanghamitra Patel</b>	: Social Activist
<b>Sandeep Sahu</b>	: Senior Journalist
<b>Sarala Rajya Lakshmi</b>	: Joint Director, Women Development and Child Welfare Dept.
<b>Sarasvatichandra</b>	: Journalist, Author, Documentary Film Maker
<b>Saraswathi Rama</b>	: Journalist and Feminist Writer
<b>Shashank</b>	: Author, Poet, Artiste
<b>Shashi Baliga</b>	: Journalist, Editor, Academician
<b>Savitri.D.V.L.</b>	: News Editor in HMTV, Writer
<b>Siddharth Bhatia</b>	: Journalist and Author
<b>Sridhar.K.V.</b>	: Advertising Professional
<b>Srilekha Bose</b>	: Professor and Writer
<b>Suchitra Maurya</b>	: Banker
<b>Sudha Goparaju</b>	: Writer, Poet
<b>Sujata Madhok</b>	: Senior Journalist and Activist
<b>Sunil Jha</b>	: Media Professional, Journalist
<b>Sunil Kumar</b>	: Editor, Writer, Photographer, Teacher
<b>Sunitha Krishnan</b>	: Co founder of Prajwala , Social Activist
<b>Sunny Sebastian</b>	: Deputy Editor,Senior Journalist, and VC of Harideo Joshi University
<b>Suresh.K.G.</b>	: Senior Journalist and Consulting Editor
<b>Suresh Ranjan Goduka</b>	: Editor,Development Communication Activist



<b>Swanand Kirkire</b>	: Author
<b>Tamil Selvan</b>	: Writer
<b>Teresa rehman</b>	: Senior Journalist, Founder of The Thumb Print
<b>Thota Bhavanarayana:</b>	Senior Journalist
<b>Tina Mehta</b>	: Brand Strategist
<b>Tulsidas Bhoite</b>	: Media Professional
<b>Udaya Bhanu</b>	: Actor, Poet, Singer
<b>Umamaheshwara</b>	
<b>Rao C</b>	: Social and Human Rights Activist, Film Maker
<b>Urvashi Dev Rawal</b>	: Senior Journalist
<b>Usha Turaga-Revelli</b>	: Journalist and Broadcaster
<b>Vanaja.C.</b>	: Journalist and Film Maker
<b>Vasanthalakshmi.V.</b>	: Critic, Translator, writer
<b>Venigalla Venkata</b>	
<b>Ratnam</b>	: Writer and Columnist
<b>Vinayak Patrudkar</b>	: Editor IBN Lokmat

# Our Supporters

## **2013-16**

Blue Star

Indian Bank

United Phosphorus Ltd

Piramal Group

Vivanta by Taj

Lotus Hospitals

Hitkari Trading Corporation

NRB Bearings

MADISON

CIPLA

Canadian Consulate

Colors

IPPF, FPAI and European Commission

Raintree

Spenta Multimedia

Anil Murarka and Manish Murarka

The Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing

# Our Media Partners

Metro India

Chhatisgarh Khabar

The Telegraph

Rajasthan Patrika

# *Laadli*

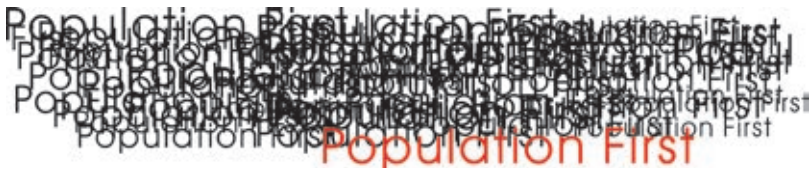
*Laadli* works with various stakeholder groups to change the mindset that undervalues the girl child and makes her unwanted in millions of Indian homes. Through our advocacy and communications campaign we try to address the gender discrimination and inequality between the sexes. We work with the youth and media at large to question the deep-rooted son preference in our society and change the gendered mindsets.

The *Laadli* Media Advocacy initiatives focus on promoting gender sensitivity in media and advertising by organizing innovative training programmes, campaigns and workshops, engaging media and advertising industry leaders in consultations and presenting awards to gender sensitive reporting and advertising.

## **About the *Laadli* Media Awards**

The *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity is the only one of its kind in the world given exclusively for promoting gender sensitivity in the media and advertising. For the first time *Laadli* with the support of International Advertising Association has expanded its wings to South Asian region, thus making it the First South Asia *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity.

The Awards are supported by UNFPA and this year, COLORS Viacom 18, one of India's fastest growing media and entertainment networks, is associated with us as our Cause Partner. It is a year-long advocacy initiative with senior editors, media leaders, journalists, and cultural icons that culminates in the awards functions. The objective of The *Laadli* Media Awards is to draw the attention of the public to the positive efforts in the media with regard to gender sensitive reportage and provide a platform for showcasing such efforts. It does not focus on visible achievers but on media persons who are reporting from the field level- analyzing laws, policies, programmes, events and incidents using a gender lens. By acknowledging and felicitating the media persons who are writing positive stories on gender we hope to encourage more people to join the movement.



**Registered Office**

Shetty House, 3rd floor,  
101, M. G. Road, Mumbai - 400 001.  
Tel : +91 22 22626672, +91 22 22672411

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**Postal Address**

64, Wodehouse Road, Ratan Manzil, , Ground floor.  
Colaba, Mumbai – 400005  
Tel : +91 91679 02776  
info@populationfirst.org  
www.populationfirst.org  
FB: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/Laadli>  
Blog: [http:// laadlimerilaadli.blogspot.in/](http://laadlimerilaadli.blogspot.in/)  
Twitter Handle: Laadli\_PF

Contributions to Population First are exempt  
from tax under section 80G of Income Tax Act.



Ladi

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

**Breaking News** brings to you a compilation of writings from *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards from 2013 to 2017. The articles featured show the wide range of issues covered, the analytical depth and the sensitivity displayed across newspapers and languages in the country. Many new issues have been covered in an unselfconscious manner. This compilation of articles reports on

various issues pertinent to the conversation on gender in India like women and conflict zones, concerns of working women and an entire section on reporting on the rights of LGBTQ+. These articles have contributed to the dialogue on gender equality, deepened our understanding of the prevalent discriminatory practices in society and highlighted the lacunae in the programmes implemented by the State.



**Dr A. L Sharada** is active in the developmental sector for the last 27 years as a researcher, trainer and programme manager.

She is the Director of Population First since the last 14 years. She had the opportunity to

work with international agencies like UNICEF, UNFPA and other non-government organisations as a consultant.

She was on the faculty of the Central University of Hyderabad and Indian Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur. She was invited

by the State Department of USA to represent India under the International Visitors Leadership Programme (IVLP) on Role of NGOs in Global Gender Issues.

She is a special invitee to the State Supervisory Board on PCPNDT Act, and was a member of the Committee constituted to suggest amendments to the MTP Act.

Dr. Sharada was awarded Anita Parekh Award – Rotary Club and the Changemaker Award by Working Mothers in 2016.

**Revathi Asokan** is an ex-banker and has managed and coordinated the *Laadli* Media And Advertising Awards for three years.



### **The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**

works to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled. UNFPA focuses on three key tracks in India:

1. Investing in adolescents and youth especially the vulnerable
2. Expanding the availability and use of integrated sexual and reproductive health information and services with a focus on family planning
3. Ending the practice of gender-biased sex selection and promoting gender equity and equality.

### **POPULATION FIRST**

Population First is a not for profit organization registered in March 2002. Our key objective is to work towards gender sensitive and social development-oriented health and population programmes. We promote gender sensitivity and gender equality through:

- Awareness programmes on gender, health, population and social development issues
- Mobilising community participation in population, health and social development programmes
- Working with influencers in media and advertising to change mind sets related to girls and women's rights and gender equality.

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