

# Population First

VOLUME 6: AUGUST 2022

## TANA BANA

Newsletter of Population First

### From the Editor's Desk

The fragility of states sees the slump in the rights of its citizens, failing institutions, and collapsing economy. While India ranks 69th out of 179 countries, Finland tops the chart on the Fragile State Index powered by The Fund for Peace, implying that it is the least fragile state. In this issue, we explore the impact on communities in such geographies, with Dr. Stephen Commins, a globally known expert.

We look at Bilkis Bano from a human perspective and try to explore the emotional and psychological fallouts in the Spotlight section.

Book Corner this issue reviews Satyajit Ray - From Frame to Frame by Shoma A. Chatterji. The reviewer, Manjira Mazumdar looks at how Ray has presented women in his works.

Reel Corner features a review by Sharen Thumbroo of Mumbai 400008 - A story of betrayal, pain, and desperation, a documentary film by Santoshee Gulabkali Mishra. The internationally acclaimed film captures the stark reality of sex workers in the Kamathipura area of Mumbai in wake of the pandemic.

Population First has been at the forefront of mainstreaming gender sensitivity in the media. At the recently concluded workshop at Hyderabad, journalists from the southern states were taken through a robust roster to acquaint them with various aspects of gender-sensitive reporting. Happenings capture the highlights.

Happy reading!

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## Interview of the Month:

# Fragile States and Gender Equality

*For this issue, we take a look at fragile states and access to services. We also look at the role of various organizations including NGOs, and those in the media. **Dr. Stephen Commins** works in areas of regional and international development, with an emphasis on service delivery and governance in fragile states. At UCLA, Dr. Commins teaches courses in regional and international development and the role of Non-Governmental Organizations.*



*All views expressed are those of the expert and should not be attributed to Tana Bana*

### **Q. How would you characterize Fragile states?**

A. Fragile states are generally defined as states that lack the capacity and/or the will to provide for the well-being and security of their citizens. According to recent estimates, they contain around 10% of the developing world's population, while they account for 25% of the population in extreme poverty. Different terms have been used to describe their situation such as prolonged crisis, post-conflict or political transition, and deteriorating governance.

In regards to human well-being, these states present persistent challenges for their citizens by not living up to citizen expectations for basic services and security.

For example, the burden of disease and the mortality levels experienced by the populations of fragile states are extraordinarily high:

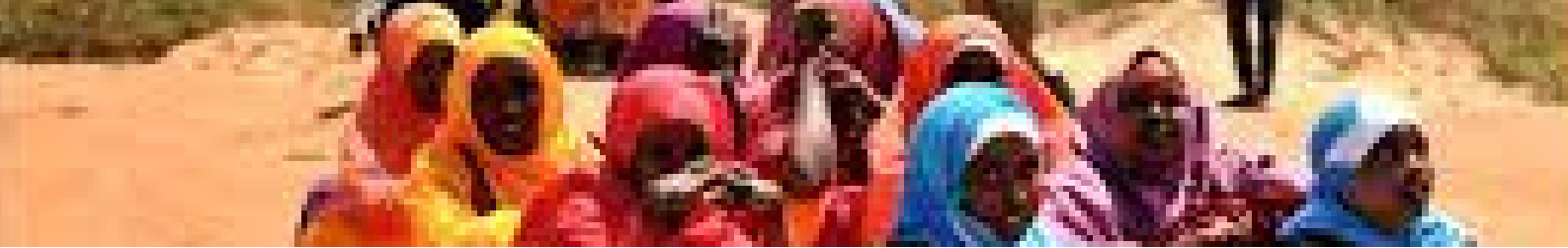
- More than a third of maternal deaths worldwide occur in a fragile state.
- Half of the children who die before age five live in a fragile state.
- A third of the people in fragile states are malnourished.
- Malaria death rates are 13 times greater in fragile states than in other developing countries

### **Q. Access to various services- how does it pan out for men, women, and LGBTQIA**

A. Equitable access to essential public services is vital for human development, for making growth inclusive, and for tackling persistent inequality. Disparities in access exist between different income groups, urban versus rural areas, conflict-affected versus relatively stable regions, between men, women, and girls, and between and within ethnic groups. Underlying inequalities can be exacerbated or reproduced where they manifest as uneven access to public services. In fragile states, unequal access to health, coupled with poor quality of delivery, recreates long-term forms of inequality in health outcomes. In practice, formal and informal institutions and social norms determine whether access to services is inclusive and equitable, or not, and for women, excluded minority groups, due to sexual orientation or religion, or ethnicity, fragile states tend to exacerbate exclusion.

Maintaining gender balance in the workforce is a challenge. In many conflict-affected contexts, fewer girls graduate from secondary school and fewer young women enter employment than boys and young men.

*The header photograph is courtesy The Fund for Peace*



## Interview of the Month:

This perpetuates a vicious circle: fewer female teachers and healthcare workers mean fewer girls and women can go to school or access healthcare. Among the serious issues that limit secondary education access to girls is security, particularly with regard to sexual predation in and on the journey to schools, and concerns for their safety and honor. The same security and honor issues are also faced by female teachers and healthcare workers.

**Q. Do they differ for conflicts, natural disasters, and politically unstable geographies? If so, how?**

A. Disasters affect all countries but people living in fragile states, often affected by violent conflict, are affected by them most severely. According to the Overseas Development Institute, between 2004 and 2014, 58 percent of all deaths from disasters occurred in the 30 most fragile states. Furthermore, very often disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation are not given due attention in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence.

Disasters associated with natural hazards hit those living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts hardest. Yet the DRR policy, programming, and financing architecture has failed to consider conflict. DRR practice is based on a set of assumptions that need to be critiqued to advance progress for the most in need; those living in contexts where disasters and conflict collide.

**Q. What are the problems in accessing healthcare in such regions? How are women affected?**

A. A wide range of studies and program experiences highlight that there are two basic ways in which gender considerations are important in fragile states.

First, men and women are affected differently by state fragility. Second, gender roles and relations are crucial to understanding opportunities and obstacles to state building. Some examples of why gender matters in understanding differential impact:

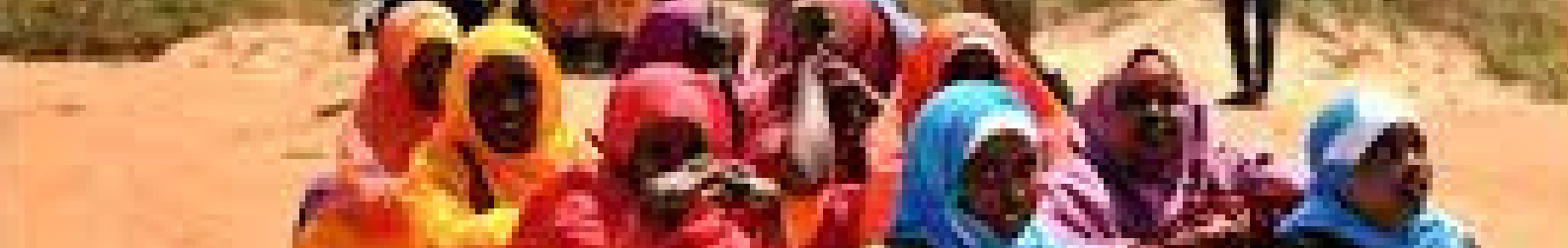
- Human rights violations in fragile states affect women and men differently. In some fragile settings, women and girls are vulnerable to rape and other forms of gender-based violence, as well as to forced displacement. In others, men and boys are targeted by campaigns to recruit or eliminate potential combatants.

- Extreme poverty is another prevailing feature of most fragile and failing states. Women are hard hit by poverty where they are excluded from full participation in the labor force or credit markets, by law or by practice.

- Women and girls can also have less access to already weak social services like health and primary education in fragile states. Women and girls take on greater work burdens when basic services are limited and when men are drafted into the war.

**Q. What have the learnings been during the Pandemic?**

A. State fragility is a concept that highlights potential problems with a country's responsiveness to pandemic events. Concern about fragile states has gained added urgency in the context of COVID-19 because the fallout from the pandemic stresses countries' social fabrics in ways that could deepen fragility and exacerbate protracted crises. Just as governments have difficulty responding to rapidly increasing health, food, and other emergency needs from natural disasters, they have struggled with pandemic responses.



## Interview of the Month:

It is also critical to recognize that vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, indigenous people, those with disabilities, adolescents, and refugees and migrants, are at a heightened risk of experiencing both the direct health impacts of COVID-19 and its effects on other services, such as education or WASH. The burden will not be equally distributed across different groups. Targeted actions and policies are necessary to protect vulnerable populations from pandemics (as with natural disasters) and their indirect impacts.

### **Q. What would you recommend that various organizations, such as grassroots not-for-profit, healthcare be watchful of to ensure ease of access to all groups, especially marginalized communities?**

Community organizations can contribute to improved access to services through several approaches, such as creating citizen demand for services, as within fragile states there can be a disenfranchisement of citizen interaction with State processes and decision making. This separation of State and citizen can result in low levels of expectation and therefore weak demand for accountability from the citizens and civil society.

There can be support for the capacity to gather information. It is very common for civil society groups to gather as much information as they can and perceive the information accumulated as an end in itself. This situation can often lead to large but disorganized information which produces communication with limited relevance or impact on government bodies.

There can also be support for communication skills so that the information is focused and relevant. It can be used in an efficient and effective way that directly adds value to the process of ensuring access for the most vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Building organizational and individual capacity to identify and process the information available to them can directly influence the quality and credibility of their demand for programs that reach marginalized communities.

### **Q. Any tips for media while reporting on various aspects to produce a gender-nuanced report?**

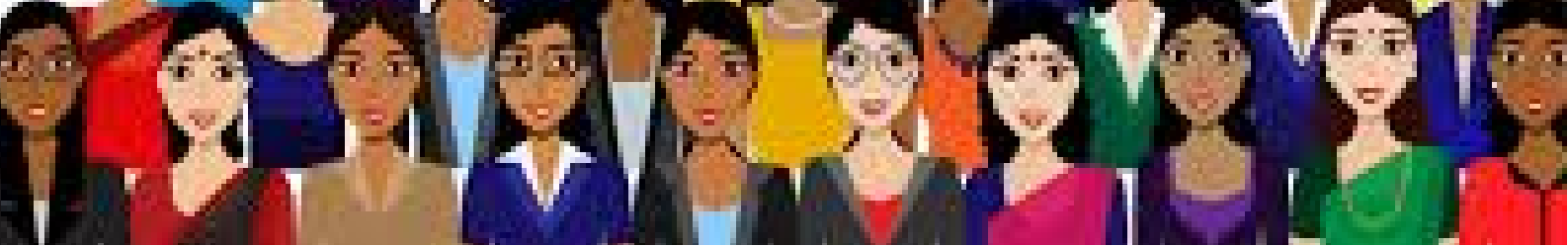
Because women are often negatively impacted by state fragility, there is a risk that they will be reduced to the status of voiceless victims. Yet, in fragile states and in natural disasters, women are frequently the active agents of preventing community violence, maintaining basic services, and responding to the impacts of disasters.

Reporting on women's roles in fragile situations can include:

- Identifying women's leadership and actions to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises.
- Media standards that have an emphasis on the inclusion of the most vulnerable, supported by a common platform for their stories as active voices.
- Harnessing technologies to support the direct voice of women who would otherwise not be heard in reporting systems.
- Developing systematic links with local women's organizations to ensure feedback and corrective action to adjust messages.

### **Questions to guide communication strategies:**

- What are the roles of the media in supporting women's voices in fragile states?
- How can media contribute adequately towards platforms for women's voices?
- What factors hinder the performance of the media in enhancing women's voices?



## Spotlight

# The trauma of justice denied: Bilkis Bano

Ritu Motial, Programme Director, Laadli, Population First

"When I heard that the convicts who had devastated my family and life, had walked free, I was speechless. I am still numb. How can justice for any woman end like this? I trusted the highest courts in our land and the system. My faith has been shaken totally," says Bilkis Bano after hearing the news of the release of 11 men who were serving life sentences for rape and murder in an interview to BBC. On 15 August 2022, these men walked out of the jail, free and ready to be assimilated back into society with enthusiasm.

Amidst the carnage of the 2002 Gujarat riots, Bilkis then 19 and pregnant with her second child was running from village to village seeking shelter from rioting mobs with 14 members of her family. She was gang-raped by a group of men whom she had seen growing up in her village. She also witnessed the murder of her family which included her young daughter.

In a country that prides itself in its culture that looks at women as Goddesses and worships the 'Kanya' as a Devi ritually twice a year, this move appears to scoff at that very notion. A daughter was not only brutally raped but witnessed the gruesome murder of her family members including her young child. I am not well-placed to talk about the legalities. But, as a woman, if I try to put myself in her shoes, words fail me to express what Bilkis must be experiencing currently. Any sexual assault effectively takes away a sense of safe space and personal dignity for a woman leaving her with a notion that she has little or no agency over her body, psyche, and wellbeing. It forces her to question her very existence.

In a patriarchal society that deifies women, puts them on a pedestal, and upholds so-called purity as a virtue where does it leave her now that she is "defiled"? How does she look at her bruised body and experience her battered spirit? During my various conversations with several women who have experienced any form of sexual abuse at any point in their life, I have found that the first instinct is to reject that body that has led them to be subjected to the assault. The rejection is not limited to just the body, they question themselves, their mannerisms, and the way they walk, and present themselves to society, convinced that it was indeed their fault; perhaps, they could have done something different. But Bilkis, what could she have done differently? How does she explain this crime of hate that she has had to experience? And now, with the remission being granted to the men who have wronged her, and to get them convicted was a protracted and tough battle, it is only natural that she feels let down by the system and insecure. Her loss of dignity is only something we can imagine. Bilkis writes in her appeal to the Gujarat government to "give me back my right to live without fear and in peace."

Research has shown that nearly one-third of those who have experienced a sexual assault experience PTSD an equal number have suicidal thoughts. Nearly everyone goes through mental health issues like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, low self-esteem, phobias, fear of rejection, self-blame, flashbacks of the incident, and more. It takes years of work to come out of the trauma, provided they have access to appropriate mental health facilities.







### Satyajit Ray's heroines on celluloid

A review of Satyajit Ray - From Frame to Frame (Vitasta) by Shoma A.Chatterji  
Manjira Mazumdar

Shoma. A Chatterji wears several hats, but the common thread through her writings, whether on cinema, current issues, or even short stories, is the gender perspective she brings to the analysis and narrative.

Author of nearly 25 books and counting, Shoma Chatterji has assessed all aspects of the works of such luminaries as P.C Barua, Bimal Roy, Ritwik Ghatak, and Satyajit Ray, but the central leitmotif of her books, is women. Her woman is in the plural; woman as a muse, an underdog, a victim of poverty and abuse. She discusses the female gaze in addition to the demonstration of empathy.

After Chatterji's book **The Female Gaze: essays on Gender, Society and Media**, no artist has been able to do away with the female gaze; rightly or wrongly. In her previous book, **The Woman at the Window**, she explores the loneliness of women and extended this subject to several of her other essays. In another of her book, **Suchitra Sen: The Legend and the Enigma**, she looked into the myriad roles essayed by this star within the realm of commercial cinema.

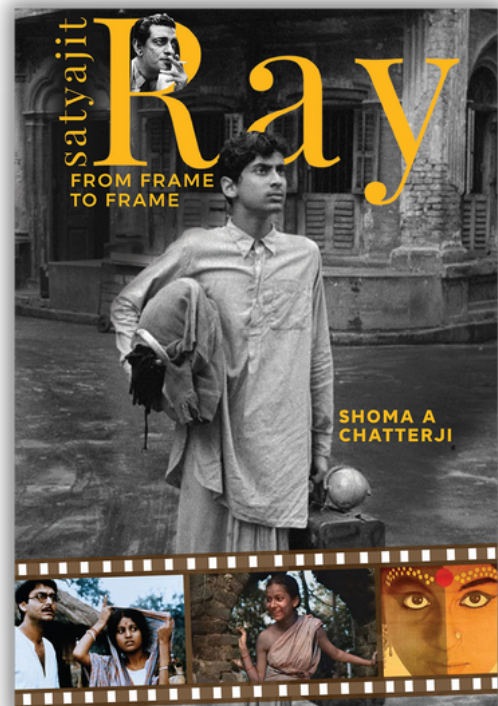
In her latest book **Satyajit Ray- From Frame to Frame**, a tribute to Satyajit Ray published by Vitasta Publishing, to commemorate his centenary, she has focused a whole section on feminism as seen in his films. In Mahanagar, we discover the metamorphosis of the sheltered housewife, who is compelled to take up a job of a saleswoman in face of an acute financial crunch in her joint family. The scene of her tentatively applying lipstick is still enduring and can be compared with the Muslim woman who has a similar job role in **Lipstick Under the Burkha**, a film by Alankrita Srivastava. The catch-22 scenario that women still face needs to be discussed. If they go out, they are looked upon suspiciously yet life is a grind with men out of jobs, or men blowing their money on liquor.

This problem plagues women across the spectrum even today, especially with jobs on the decline.

This apart, the literary liaison in Charulata, it is all about friendship outside the marriage and the Greek tragic elements of Devi, who is worshipped as a goddess against her will, or women who are penalized for no fault of theirs. . . Women, in a sense, have no agency and are rewarded and penalized according to the whims of others. The mainstreaming of prostitution in Seemabadha, Pratiwandi, Ashani Shanket, and Jana Aranya is a spin-off from the role of earning and staving off poverty, not just for herself, but for her family as well.

The critical point to be noted is that when men use women to gain some benefits, it is a prostitution of their conscience, but to a woman, it is a question of being ostracized from society, ill health, and no protection from the law. The films in which directors like Benegal and Gulzar have shown prostitutes are not about their problems. They are mere characters. According Ray shows them as neither enjoying power nor freedom, according to the author.

*Manjira Majumdar is an independent writer and researcher based in Kolkata. She has been on a jury for many prestigious awards including the Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity.*



## "Mumbai 400008 - A story of betrayal, pain, and desperation"

By Sharen Thumboo, PhD Research Scholar



The spread of Covid-19 has impacted many industries worldwide, including the sex trade. The law does not prohibit voluntary sex work in India. Still, sex work-related activities, such as owning a brothel and inducing others into prostitution, are prohibited. Award-winning journalist Santoshee Gulabkali Mishra brought the realities of struggle, survival, tears, and pain of mothers and daughters who survive on sex work in the Kamathipura neighborhood of Mumbai into our lives in her hard-hitting, heart-wrenching documentary "Mumbai 400008 - A story of betrayal, pain, and desperation"

The pandemic has severely affected sex workers. With no legal protection and little government support, sex workers have been left to fend for themselves during the pandemic. The situation has forced many people to work to meet their basic needs, putting themselves at risk of infection. The pandemic has also decreased demand for sex work, leaving many sex workers without income. The documentary takes us into shanty rented rooms where women share small spaces, leaving no room for social distancing or isolation at a time when social distancing and isolation saved lives.

This relevant documentary highlights the desperation of sex workers during the Covid-19 pandemic when Mumbai police shut down the trade that thrives on physical and sexual contact. Mishra's empathy as a filmmaker has allowed sex workers who avoid cameras, press, and police, to open up to the world about their helplessness and desperation.

While the world views sex work from a moral perspective, Mishra's documentary highlights the social-economic perspective faced by sex workers during the most critical times of a devastating health pandemic. Through in-depth personal interviews, the documentary showcases the government's inattention as the women of Kamathipura struggled to obtain basic human necessities such as food, water, and sanitation. As sex workers struggled for food, resorting to begging, some of them were assaulted by police when they tried to access food parcels provided by charitable organizations. The documentary highlights their burden of caring for their families back home, their household expenses, and their medical bills. Through this documentary, we see a group of women who carries the weight of financial constraints on their shoulders, with no one to turn to. Despite the government's legal obligation to assist sex workers, their assistance never reached them, leaving them in dire straits.

The horror of their realities, highlighted in this documentary, shines a light on the deep, dark secrets of the sex trade in India. Most women interviewed for this documentary shared their ghastly experiences of being sold into the sex trade and later how their socio-economic situations forced them to stay.

When a deadly disease halted the world, people survived on the generosity of each other. Although the government provided necessities to individuals and families, Mishra's documentary reveals that the women of Kamathipura were forgotten, and hopefully opens the eyes of policymakers to ensure that sex workers are given access to basic amenities, especially during times of pandemics and distress.



## Happenings

# Journalists from Southern states strengthen their skills at “Reporting Through a Gender Lens”- Media Workshop

On August 11th and 12th, twenty-five journalists from the five Southern states of India, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana came together for a two-day residential program at Hyderabad to gain insights into reporting on various issues from a gender perspective.

Seven sessions and two-panel discussions took the attendees through topics as diverse as education, gender-based violence, media and gender representation, post-covid media and challenges for women, and more. Acclaimed faculty shared their experiences and latest trends with the participants.

**Dr. A.L. Sharada**, the director, of Population First, welcomed the attendees and set the stage for the proceedings in her ice-break session. She shared statistics on the status of women in India in the following session **Status of women in India: Striking Stats** and noted, “While the overall sex ratio in India may have apparently improved, one has to be careful about interpreting the data correctly and look at other sets of statistics to ascertain whether this change has happened or not. For instance, the sex ratio at birth continues to be low, which means that we still have a long way to go.”

The second session on **Sex, Patriarchy, and Gender** acquainted all present with the complex concepts. **Aparna Thota**, a gender trainer elaborated on the difference between sex and gender. She said, “Media shapes the way we think, believe, and do. It is important that we explore finer nuances of gender in every story and view every aspect of our reporting to ensure that it does not echo the inherent patriarchy, and questions the biases and stereotypes.”

Talking about women in media in her session **Women in Media and Women and Media**, **Dr. Sharada** shared several examples of how women were ill-represented in the media. “Media has a responsibility to question the stereotypes and sensibly portray women.” She alluded to the entire spectrum of media including advertisements; and spoke of the shifts that are evident, even though more work remains to be done. She emphasized the need to include more women in various narratives including those about science, technology, finance, politics, policy, and management.



Following Dr. Sharada’s session, **Asiya Shervani**, a renowned D&I Strategist presented various aspects of diversity, equality, and inclusion and their importance in her session titled **Diversity and Inclusion in Media**. She spoke of the importance of including diverse voices while reporting. She highlighted the need to include narratives of marginalized segments such as LGBTQIA and people from the lower socio-economic spectrum.

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The penultimate session of the day saw a robust panel discussion on Challenges and opportunities to promote gender sensitivity in the media. Panelists deliberated on what ails the media when it comes to gender sensitivity. They highlighted how the media houses were increasingly becoming profit-driven and producing content that may not do justice to gender issues. Narratives lacked in-depth analysis and compromised to fit the corporate diktats. They also spoke of how women and LGBTQIA communities were under-represented in the workforce which was predominantly male-dominated. The panel discussion was deftly steered by Rajeshwari Kalyanam, senior journalist, and included Satyavati Kondaveeti, founder Bhumika Women's Collective, **Sudhakar Reddy Udumula** editor, Investigations TOI, Hyderabad, **Rizwan Ahmad** director of Instructional Media, MAANU, **Ramani Balabadrpatruni**, senior scriptwriter.

The day ended with the screening of **Mumbai 400008 - A Story of Betrayal, Pain and Desperation**, a documentary by **Santoshee Mishra**, a journalist, documentary filmmaker, and investigative researcher. The narrative captures the plight of nearly 7000 sex workers of Kamathipura, Falkland Road, and Faras Road during the trying and devastating COVID-19 pandemic. The film has traveled the globe as an official entry to many film festivals.



Day two commenced with a recapitulation of the previous day's learnings. **Dr. A.L. Sharada** took the participants through an understanding of stereotypes and unconscious biases. In her session **Stereotyping and Unconscious Biases**, she elaborated on the concept and how it stymied cogent information flow. She also looked at the types of stereotypes, how they are formed and the detrimental effect they have on society. She also provided insight into various kinds of biases and how they colored the way we look at various issues, and demonstrated the unconscious biases we all carry through a series of group activities.



**Anuja Gulati**, programme specialist, UNFPA, India conducted the next two sessions- **Reporting on Gender-Biased Sex Selection** and **Reporting on Gendered-Based Violence**. She spoke of sensitivity in reporting on GBSS. “Communication on sex selection generally uses the fear and guilt angle to talk of the consequences of the practice. It is often linked with abortion creating a misconception that abortion is illegal. Care has to be taken that women’s access to safe and legal abortion is not compromised at any point. While reporting on GBV, Anuja Gulati noted that it would be useful if the narrative could weave in an expanded



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ambit of what constitutes GBV. “It is important that we understand what exactly is Gender-Based Violence and its extent. Is it just sexual assault or domestic violence? It goes beyond this and any act that violates a person physically, emotionally, sexually, or psychologically is a part of the entire spectrum,” she noted while highlighting what constituted GBV. She shared a comprehensive list of mandatories while reporting on both GBV and GBSS to enable the journalist to make a more nuanced and comprehensive piece.

**Kaumudi Nagaraju**, founder & executive director, of Learning Space presented a gender perspective on education in her session **Gender and Education**. She highlighted how the school curriculum is skewed and presents women and girls in a stereotypical manner. She stressed the need to make education more accessible to girls and sensitive about the portrayal of women and LGBTQIA communities. She noted that a well-rounded education helps in shaping minds to look at various socio-economic and political aspects from a neutral and unbiased standpoint. She also stressed the importance of STEM disciplines becoming more inclusive in their access and not be limited to male domination.



The final session was a panel discussion that looked at how COVID has affected women journalists. Titled Women in Media: Covid and After the panel comprised **Vanaja C**, Journalist, Writer & Author, **K Srinivas**, chief editor, Andhra Jyothi, and was moderated by **Thulasi Chandu**, an independent journalist. The panelists noted how women reporters were at the receiving end of the pandemic in more ways than one. They not only were burdened with the increased workload, but they also had to weather stark working conditions without access to proper facilities while reporting from the field. A number of them were laid off following the shafting of the workforce as it was felt that men were more suited to the altered requirements.



# Population First



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