

Population First

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TANA BANA

Newsletter of Population First

From the Editor's Desk

We come back to you with the 9th volume of Tana Bana our monthly newsletter. We have with us Vibhuti Patel joining us taking a look at the Union budget from a gender perspective. Like every year , it is disappointing to note the government not walking the talk in terms of its commitments to the strategic development goals for gender equality and women empowerment, health, and education.

We also have Dr.Sharada engaging in a candid conversation with noted tribal rights activist, Dr.Soma Parthasarathy on the intersectionality of tribal cultures, development and gender dynamics that is threatening the very identity and existence of tribal populations. The insights provided are eye opening. Do take time and read the full interview to get an in depth understanding of issues related to tribal populations.

Shoma Chatterjee, an old friend of Laadli, film critic and author writes about 'Rapist', a much-acclaimed film by Aparna Sen who decides to experiment with the mindset of the rapist even after he has been awarded a death sentence.

Dr. Mangala reviews the book Alochna ka Stree Paksh by Sujata who provides a substantial critique of feminist traditions, methodology, history and a reading of feminist texts from a gender perspective.

After a gap of two years, Mumbai witnessed enthusiastic participation of Mumbaikars, NGOs and Corporates in the Tata Mumbai Marathon. We had the IRB team supporting our cause and many others contributing generously. We are happy to share a few glimpses of our team at the Marathon with you all.

Take your time and read the newsletter at leisure

What's Inside

From the editor's desk

PAGE 01

Lead Article

PAGE 02

Candid Conversations

PAGE 04

Reel life

PAGE 06

Book Corner

PAGE 08

Happenings

PAGE 10



Lead Article

The Union Budget (2023-24) under Gender Lens by Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Gender Economist



Introduction

The current budget has focussed on CAPEX, an increase in capital expenditure by 33 percent to Rs 10 lakh crore i.e. 3.3 percent of the GDP to promote technology, infrastructure and private manufacturing sector. But it has ignored social sector. Women's empowerment does not just mean an increase in budgets related to the women-centric program, rather it is about mainstreaming gender across budgets of all ministries and Departments. We have Dr. Vibhuti Patel, the well-known gender economist, and women's rights activist. She has been actively involved with the women's rights movement since the early 1970s. She has been a contributor to the 'The Report of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (2020)' brought out by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). She delves deep into what are the existing trends of female labor participation in India, taking a look at the budget under Gender Lens.

Social Sector Budgetary Allocations

Only 8% of Gross Domestic product is allocated to social sector that includes education (2.9%), health (1%); food security (1%); women and child welfare, SCP, TSP, housing, rural employment, pension (4.1%). Overall share of social services in the Union budget is reduced from 7.5% in 2022-23 to 5.7 % in 2023-24. Though National Education Policy, 2020 recommended 6% of GDP to be allocated to education, it gets less than half amount. The allocation for agriculture and allied sectors, including PM-KISAN, is Rs 1.4 lakh crore, lower than the budget estimate for 2022-23.

Poverty Alleviation through Paid-employment Programme

MGNREGA's the financial allocation has been cut to Rs 60,000 crore which will not be able to fund 40 days of work to the unemployed rural men and women as against the stipulated 100 day of paid-work. The actual expenditure in 2021-22 was Rs 98,468 crore and the expected expenditure in 2022-23 is Rs 89,400 crore. This is really distressing as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and Centre for

Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) data indicate high levels of youth unemployment, continued precarity and constrained household consumption.

The total allocation for the National Social Assistance scheme, anganwadis, the National Livelihood Mission and nutrition programmes has stagnated at less than Rs 60,000 crore. Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers, applauded by WHO are left in the lurch. Though they are employed by the state, they are not even given the stipulated minimum wages and other social protection as they are labelled as 'volunteers', not 'workers' and are given miserly amount in the name of 'honorarium' and ASHA's are given performance linked nominal incentives. As a ratio to GDP, the allocation for the above anti-poverty programmes has declined from 0.79 per cent in 2022-23 to 0.53 per cent. The other two major programmes are the drinking water and housing programmes with an overall allocation of Rs 1.5 lakh crore and an increase of 13 per cent from the revised estimate of 2022-23, but still below the budget estimate of 2021-22.

Food Security



Lead Article

The food subsidy has been cut by 31 per cent from Rs 2.87 lakh crore to Rs 1.97 lakh crore and the fertiliser subsidy by over 22 per cent from Rs 2.25 lakh crore to Rs 1.75 lakh crore. The allocation for food procurement and market intervention has been reduced from Rs 72,000 crore to Rs 60,000 crore. This is really sad when National Family Health Survey between 2019 and 2021 (NFHS 5) found increased malnutrition among Children- as many as 36% of India's children were stunted or short for their age, 19% had low weight for height and 32% had low weight for age.

Education and Health

The education and health sectors have seen a marginal improvement from the budget estimates for 2022-23, but are totally inadequate in terms of the requirement. As a ratio to GDP, the allocation for education has witnessed a steady decline from 0.63 per cent in 2013-14 to 0.37 per cent in the present budget. India is on course to be the third largest economy, but we will continue to be at the bottom in terms of the quality of life of people.

157 new nursing colleges co-located with medical colleges have been promised by the budget. But budget is silent about ASHA and Anganwadi workers.

Even for public health, additional budgets are needed, for quality public health infrastructure and more human resources in terms of doctors, specialists, nurses and health administrators and technicians. **Only 80% of sanctioned doctor posts were filled in the Primary Health Centres & only 36% of sanctioned posts for specialist doctor posts were filled in Community Health Centres according to the Accountability Initiative.**

Budget for Gender Equity Concerns

This year's desired or estimated budget for women and child development is Rs 25,448 crore which is barely up from the previous year. There is no substantial increase in portfolio allocation related to the umbrella scheme Mission Shakti, an integrated women empowerment programme as umbrella scheme for the safety, security and empowerment of women for implementation during the 15th Finance Commission period from 2021-22 to 2025-26; that has two action agenda under Samarthya and Sambhal under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Transgender community expected a comprehensive development commitment from the Union Budget, beyond poorly funded Garima Grih.

Conclusion

The Union Budget 2023 has given significant relief to the middle classes; however, India's vast majorities of working people in rural, tribal and urban areas facing intersectional unrealities need more focused budgetary support from the Union Government as centralised taxation system has depleted resources of the state governments drastically.

The gender economists and Feminist Policy Collective had submitted pre-budget recommendations after national level detailed deliberations with gender economists and women's rights groups with an aim of Transformative Financing for Women and Girls. But none of them find place in the Union Budget (2023-24).



Candid Conversations

Tribal Women, Development and Gender Dynamics

Dr. Sharada, Director, Population First in conversation with Dr. Soma Parthasarathy, Researcher/Practitioner - Gender, Sustainable Development, Environment and Livelihoods.

Dr. Sharada: You have been working on tribal rights issues for so long, please tell us what is the status of the tribal populations today, particularly the tribal women.

Dr Soma K Parthasarathy: As far as the government statistics are concerned, everything seems to be showing a positive trend. However, there are concerns about food security and dipping sex ratio in several parts of Adivasi dominant areas. On other issues also the numbers seem to show outreach but one cannot generalize about the quality of the care. If you look at health care, traditional tribal societies had their own knowledge systems that were hugely about preventive health care which have been overwhelmed by the advancement of modern allopathic systems. Communities were dependent upon their own healers - Guni and traditional dais, and their own traditional knowledge systems. The breakdown of their access to resources, as well as their ability to define how they use their resources and the kind of work they do, have compelled them to become much more dependent on the state because their access to their herbs, and to their foods reduced with the outsiders' claims on their land. Now, with the kind of lack of access to and decay of knowledge systems that they have lived with, they are having to become more dependent on a health system, which is not designed for them. That, along with the loss of the natural resources and poverty, their nutrition intake has changed, increasing the incidence of anaemia and vulnerability to diseases among them. They used to eat far more non-veg, because they were hunter gatherers who grew more of seasonal foods, plants and vegetables. So, it is important to restore their traditional knowledge systems to make them better

able to manage their own health and not become dependent on a curative health system.

As regards education, the kind of education that's going into these areas is the formal education system, which is dependent on a set of curriculums, which is seldom designed to incorporate their systems of knowledge and sense making, The text books show houses and portray roles vastly at variance with what the rural adivasi child experiences in their lived reality. For a tribal child there is a home built in the vernacular architecture of the materials of their region they live in houses that are traditional designed and their work place is in the forest and fields, or as migrants. What the curriculum is doing is, totally displacing their traditional knowledge and bringing in a new set of knowledge, and concepts located in a vastly different environment. This causes an alienation and compels them to accept ideas far removed from their experiences and ill-suited to their ecological location. I am not saying they should not have info and understanding of other regions and practices but often their practices are presented as backward, which leaves them feeling low self esteem while their practices are often those that other societies need to learn from for their simplicity, low carbon footprint and ecological sustainability.

Let's look at sex ratio, which is viewed as an indicator of a positive attitude towards women. Tribal areas have traditionally had better sex ratios earlier. But today even in tribal areas, it is coming down. We need to understand this from the context of the value of the girl child, the value of women, and the value of women's work. Bride price was a part of the recognition, of valuing the girls labor, it meant that she was valued for the work contribution she would be making to the family - her ability to create progeny, to work as a reproducer and a



Candid Conversations

producer, it gave her some respect in her marital home. Also, marriage was not a cultural necessity. They value the symbolism of bride price over being considered as commodities of purchase. But all these cultural traditions that created some degree of gender parity among men and women are disappearing.

Since independence, private ownership of land, which was not there in the tribal population, started gaining importance and going in the patriarchal form. Earlier, the youngest daughter was considered the inheritor of the common lands in Meghalaya Khasi tribe for instance. And it was the rest of the women and men in the community who would support her to manage that land and the children of the clan, theirs was a matrilineal culture. But all this is getting eroded with the privatization of land and the concept of private property. So, we are moving from territory to property.

Dr A L Sharada: So, how do you see the future of tribal populations in India? Do you think they will get imbibed into the mainstream society, lose their identity? What is being done to restore or to maintain the identity of the tribal communities?

Dr Soma K Parthasarathy: The tribal communities are struggling to claim their autonomy, to be able to govern themselves. There are legal provisions, but that they are implemented so weakly implies that their culture, traditions and their way of life is subjected to the objectives of development and they are often seen as the collateral damage in that journey. So, if we are to restore a life of dignity and wellbeing, then it has to be in terms of the constitutional rights that they hold, which means restoring to them the right for self-governance, which the PESA Act in schedule 5 and 6 areas provides. We need to restore to them the rights over their territories and the ways of life. The Forest Rights Act does address these historical injustices and makes provisions to correct them by according them individual and community forest rights and for

women to have rights, as well as to be in decision making bodies of forest governance. This Act is however being either not effectively implemented or flouted or undermined by state agencies. Similarly, under the compensatory afforestation act, government of India, Companies are meant to compensate for the loss of forest lands but communities remain deprived, while other communities are also threatened with loss of their lands in the name of compensatory forestry. Too often the projects of mining and development are causing displacement of tribal populations to new areas, taking away the land from the adivasis and leaving them to struggle rather than recognizing their right over their land.

To get more insights into issues related to tribal communities, development agenda and gender dynamics, pl log on to

<https://laadlimerilaadli.blogspot.com/2023/02/tribal-women-development-and-gender.html> to read the full interview.

DIRECTED APARNA SEN

THE RAPIST

Reel life

The Rapist – The other end of the rope

The Rapist premiered at the 27th Kolkata International Film Festival on May 1, 2022, produced jointly by Applause Entertainment and Quest Films and directed by Aparna Sen. Shoma Chatterji, renowned film scholar, author and freelance journalists explores the complexity of rape as a creative and critical exposition.



What happens when a raped woman finds that she is carrying the child of her rapist? Does she carry on with the pregnancy or does she abort the “rape child”? How does her husband react when she decides to keep the baby? What makes her want to interact with her rapist now waiting to meet the hanging rope? Rape represents the objectification of women cinematographed through strategically composed lighting, carefully choreographed shots, sound effects, visual metaphors of props and property and so on. None of these however, happen in Aparna Sen’s film, The Rapist.

Feature films on rape till date, have kept their focus on the victim and the social outcast she is turned into, though she is the victim and not the perpetrator. But Aparna Sen has different ideas. She titles her film The Rapist which turns the perpetrator into the protagonist, in a manner of speaking. Among her long filmography, The Rapist is perhaps Aparna Sen’s most controversial film, as, for the first time, the director decides to experiment with the mindset of the rapist even after he has been awarded a death sentence. She stretches it to setting up a series of meetings between the rape victim and the rapist, a brutal reality no one has even discussed before in film or in writing.

The film opens on an enlightened, upper-middle-class couple, both professors of criminal psychology in Delhi institutions who are activists in the anti-Death Sentence movement. They are very much in

love and are desperately trying to make a baby. They live an affluent life with Naina Mishra researching death sentence criminals and her husband Aftab (Arjun Rampal) backing her all the way.

One evening, when her college is over, Naina and her friend Malini (Anindita Basu) must suddenly rush to a slum in Noida to try and rescue a young girl who has just killed her infant daughter from her mother-in-law’s wrath as this was her fourth girl-child in a row. On their way back, it is very late. Naina and Malini fail to get an app-cab. While they wait for the bus, two guys from the slum rush in on a bike. One of them rapes Naina brutally while the other breaks Malini’s neck when she tries to rescue Naina. She dies instantly.

As she begins to physically recover from the severe injuries, after the judge has announced the death sentence for the teenaged rapist Prasad (Tanmay Dhanania) from the Noida slums, Naina makes up her mind to interview Prasad. After the consulting gynecologist declares that Naina is pregnant and it is certainly not Aftab’s baby as Aftab’s sperm count is too low, Naina staunchly refuses to carry on with the ‘rape child’ though Aftab tries to dissuade her. She changes her decision to carry on with the pregnancy and now, Aftab is unhappy with her decision.



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Cinematically, all this comes across with great sensitivity by Sen and her crew, strongly yet subtly suggesting what a raped woman goes through, in public, within her circle, in her workplace and within her badly damaged psyche.

The sound design plays a stellar role in sustaining the suspense in almost every scene. Naina's painful screams when she is being medically treated, the two women's cries of agony shouting for help when they are being attacked, the sound of the cell phones, the television news channels describing the incident, the slamming of doors, the ringing of the doorbell and an entire rainbow of ambient sounds define the agony of Naina, especially when she imagines the broken-neck Malini speaking to her.

The twist in the tale comes much later, towards the end when we are introduced to Prasad, the rapist, in his solitary cell, unwashed, dirty, scratching himself every which way, waiting to be hanged to death. Though Aftab is against it, Naina insists on meeting Prasad in his cell under the guise of her "research." She goes ahead and meets his widowed mother too, to find out about his background. By the time the rapist and the victim seem to have warmed to each other, his death sentence is scheduled. He requests her to come to the execution.

So, in spite of Aftab's severe objections, Naina sets out to witness Prasad's execution. What exactly did Naina wish to prove? Whether Prasad became a rapist – he had raped before also – because of his nightmarish upbringing where he was himself a rape victim? Or, because she wanted to see who her child's father was. Or, was it to come to some conclusion about whether society actually 'creates' a rapist or is a rapist born to rape?

When she leaves, she has no answers. Sen leaves the closure completely open for the audience to draw its own conclusions. Prasad's angry outburst before he is taken to the hanging platform at Naina shocks her but she still remains doubtful about Prasad's feelings of repentance of having raped her.

Does this take us back to square one – that rape is an act of power any man can commit on a woman or on a less powerful boy or man? Or, thanks to the magnificent performance of the young Tanmay Dhanania in a very negative role, do we leave the auditorium with a tinge of empathy for him? At this point, I really have no idea.

The Rapist is a film you carry with you outside the theatre and keep musing about the rights and wrongs Sen has tried to put across

Welcome Critical Intervention in Hindi Literary Criticism

By B. Mangalam

Alochna ka Stree Paksh by Sujata is a welcome intervention in feminist discourse in general and in literary criticism in Hindi, in particular. Paternalistic attitude towards women's writing among critics in Hindi is a well-recognized truth. Often challenged by individual women poets and novelists, the tribe of critics in Hindi stay insular and unresponsive in this context. Sujata's book is a systematic, well-researched counter narrative to mansplaining and condescending critical evaluation of women's writing and feminist thought in Hindi. B.Mangalam is Professor, Department of English, Aryabhata College, University of Delhi with more than three decades of teaching experience. Her research work is on the intersectionality of caste and gender in Dalit Fiction. She has published books and articles in Journals on Dalit literature, Modern European Drama. She translates from Tamil and Hindi to English.



Unlike the run of the mill account of feminist thought or methodology in an enumerative or derivative contour, Sujata's book is a substantial critique of feminist traditions, methodology, history and a reading of feminist texts. It does not offer merely a summary of canonical texts. Instead, it takes up case study as a critical tool from different historical contexts to put together a critical perspective. Sujata also looks at the correlation between gender and language, gender and readership and of course, gender and writerly texts.

The book is organized into three major parts to examine feminist methodology, tradition and critical readings of specific texts/writers. The exploration of streevad/feminism and its relationship with alochna/criticism in Hindi critical tradition offers a historical context and a political perspective that sets the tone of the book. Looking at language at great length, Sujata argues for upholding, appreciating and assimilating the notion of 'difference' as critical praxis. This section also looks at women as readers and women as writers and the presumptions, pre-suppositions that have been imposed upon these categories by male critics, editors and publishers. Part 1 of this book thoroughly exposes the prevailing patriarchal, masculinist, restrictive paradigms that envelop mainstream literary discourse in Hindi. Sujata's angst at the recurring misogyny in publishing/editing/critical circles is well articulated, punctuated by angry outbursts, satirical rejoinders and direct appeals to her

readers. She also integrates the standpoints of western feminist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, Lucy Irigaray, Helene Cixous and others.

The second Part of the book dealing with Indian feminist tradition foregrounds multiple traditions that have shaped women's writing. The section on Women's writing shows an impressive array of writers and texts from Therigatha to Meerabai, Lal Ded, Chandrabati, Muddupalani, Molla, Mahadevi Verma, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, folk songs, riddles by women. It draws upon women's contribution in both mainstream and oral traditions. Women poets from Ritikal challenge the aesthetic and ideological perspective of male poets of this period who had reduced women's body as a commodity and subjected to voyeuristic gaze. Sujata's analysis offers theoretical, textual and historical insights. Her reading is political and underscores the need to not depoliticize women's writing/reading at any cost.

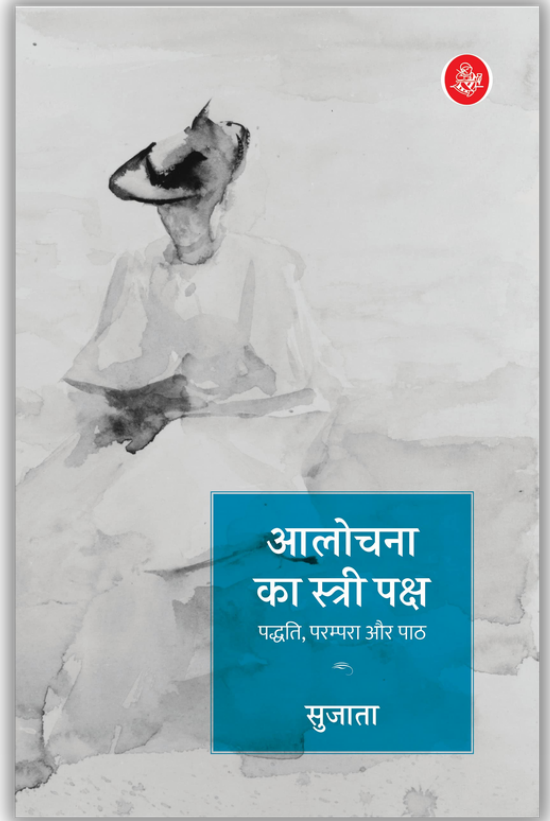
Sujata's anger at male critics and self-appointed patrons is understandable but she would do well to posit her argument rather than her rage as it is open to being read as typical womanly rant by the male coterie in Hindi critical circles. She could also refer to women poets as 'kavi', not 'kavayatri' to foreground her central argument about women's writing as primarily political as well as the prevailing misogyny among literary critics.

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The third part of the book pertains to critical reading of contemporary women's texts. This section looks at contemporary feminist poets and how they have carved a distinct language, poetic idiom and critical standpoint in Hindi literary discourse. The chapters on Anamika, Suman Keshri, Savita Singh, Nilesh Raghuvanshi offer an in-depth analysis of their poetry. Sujata locates their writings in the context of feminist historiography, critical traditions and resistance narratives. and the critical questioning of women's spatial autonomy in Nilesh The subversive use of mythology by Suman Keshri, the voice of resistance and self-affirmation in Savita Singh, the creative negotiation of women's vocabulary by Anamika Raghuvanshi's poems are well brought out by Sujata in this section. Her empathetic examination of Nirmala Putul's poetry, an overview of Dalit women's poetry fuses theory, text and identity affirmations by marginalized women in a powerful way.

A pioneering critical work in Hindi, Sujata's book is a useful critical tool for many disciplines including English Studies, History, Sociology, Caste and Tribal Studies besides being a ready reckoner on feminist tradition, history and analysis in Hindi critical discourse.





Happenings

Population First, Starting the New Year with a Bang!

With the return of the Tata Mumbai Marathon, Population First was among the scores of NGO teams who ran the famed marathon on 15th January 2023, bringing in the morning of Makar Sankranti and Pongal with lot of fanfare and fun.

This year approximately 50 runners - Corporate Team, NGO Team and Charity Bib runners ran for our organization! We are grateful to our long-term partner IRB for supporting our organization and joining us as the Corporate Team - Blazing Glory - and running for the cause of gender equality and women empowerment. We wish this longstanding partnership continues in years to come.

To our donors who sponsored our charity bibs, a big thank you!

To our runners who enthusiastically ran for the cause of gender equality, thank you, for choosing us. We invite you to our office and our field-sites to know more about our work.

To the Population First team, our friends and family who joined us in our dream run we have no words to express our gratitude.



Population First



Laadli

Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

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