



DEEP DIVE

MEDIA REPORTING ON GENDER ISSUES

Edited By

Dr. A. L. Sharada

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Norwegian Embassy
New Delhi

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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to present 'Deep Dive - Media Reporting on Gender Issues', a select compilation of award-winning entries from the '12th Edition of *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity 2022'.

It was very clear right away that the mandate set forth as the editor of this literary work is fraught with many challenges. It has been a constant internal battle, and how I wish I could have included all the award-winning entries. With each, offering such unique and passionate explorations and narratives. But it was not possible to do so and I express my regrets to all those whose work is not featured here. However, I have tried my best to represent the range of topics and regions covered, as well as highlight a few regional language and Hindi award-winning entries to provide a bird's eye view of the range and diversity of topics and issues that could be examined from a gender perspective. In terms of its structure, the book is divided into 7 sections, each detailing a certain lens from which gender can be analysed, as follows.

Beyond the Binaries

The non-cisgender communities' struggles with asserting their identity and accessing basic services and facilities are at a pivotal phase in the fight for justice. The articles in this section bring to life the stories of transpeople and the discrimination, negligence and violence that they face.

Underpaid, Undervalued

Women's work is rarely given due recognition or reward in society. Playing the dual role of a homemaker and breadwinner they face a multitude of challenges while being continually devalued and unrecognized. The articles in this section bring the issues relating to working women. From women farmers to homemakers to those pioneering grassroots-level societal change.

Invisible and Marginalized

It's a common perception that media and media institutions are for the large part primarily urban, upper caste and class-oriented and influenced by the ideologies of the political parties in power. Thus, a large number of people and communities - people with disabilities, minority groups, women, and Dalits etc, feel and remain side-lined in media reporting. In this section, we bring to you, insightful stories that focus on the issues faced by the invisible groups of women, who face marginalization and discrimination, like women working in STEM fields and Dalit women.

Violated and Degraded

Unfortunately, considering the widespread violence of various kinds against women the media reporting on the same is considerable. However, doing so in a gender-sensitive manner is critical to ensure that the narrative shifts towards a larger cultural dialogue regarding how gender is viewed and understood and acted out. This section explores the different kinds of violence that women face and their obstacles in getting justice.

Insensitive and Apathetic

While there are a number of laws, policies and programmes for women, there is general insensitivity, neglect and apathy in their implementation, impacting the lives of many women, and denying them access to services and what is rightfully theirs. This section examines these stories and how despite the challenges, there is a sense of assertion prevalent, even in the most marginalized communities.

Redefining and Reclaiming

The narratives in this section offer insight into inspiring stories that showcase the tenacity of women. And how they redefine gender equations and power relations and reclaim their position in the society.

Oppressive and Unjust

Here we look into religion and patriarchy and how they impact men and women. Be it certain careers like being a priestess or a single mother, the patriarchal social and political structures pose innumerable challenges to women. Highlighting and understanding these is an essential step to overcoming them.

We hope this compilation, 'Deep Dive', would serve as a reference for journalists, media schools and consumers of media to fine tune their understanding of gender issues and incorporate gender perspective in media reporting.

The beautiful cover page is courtesy Vinta Nanda, a dear friend of *Laadli*. A big thank you to her. I thank Pooja Nagdev for her consistent support during the process of compiling and publishing the book. I thank Sol Solutions for their editorial and design support for the book. Last but not the least, I express my gratitude to UNFPA and the Norwegian embassy which made it possible for us to organize the 12th LMAAGS events and publish this book.

Dr A L Sharada,
Director, Population First

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Beyond the Binaries

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019, prohibits any kind of discrimination against a transgender person, be it unfair treatment or denial of service in relation to employment, education, healthcare, access to public goods and facilities, etc. Yet, most transgender persons face many forms of discrimination, stigma and violence. With the National Human Rights Commission in 2018 revealing that 96 per cent transgenders are engaged in low-paying or undignified work for livelihoods, such as sex work and begging. A fate common for even those who are well-qualified.

Priyanka Sahoo in her detailed report **‘Isolated, invisible: LGBTQ scientists talk about their experience at workplace’** explores the low representation of LGBTQI+ communities in STEM subjects and institutions and highlights the biases and discrimination, casual misogyny and trans and homophobia that exists in these organizations. However, it is heartening to note the efforts being made by premier institutions like IIT-B to build more diverse and inclusive spaces to ensure that members of the LGBTQI+ community can participate and contribute to developments in science and technology equally.

There is a lot that needs to be done by the policymakers and the governments to mainstream the LGBTQI+ community into society. One heartening development in this regard is the recent decision of the Karnataka State government to reserve one percent of school teacher posts for transpersons.

However, a majority of transpeople are not in a position to aspire for careers in STEM or other fields as most of them, around 50-60 percent according to NHRC, never attended schools due to severe discrimination and harassment from fellow students and teachers. The NHRC report goes on to reveal that 52 per cent transgenders were harassed by their classmates and 15 per cent by teachers, forcing them to discontinue their studies.

In spite of the law to protect the rights of transpersons and the welfare schemes introduced by the governments, the issues faced by transpeople continue to be grave and challenging. In a blood-curdling report titled, **‘How Kerala is a long way off in gender affirmative healthcare for transpersons’** Jisha Surya exposes the unethical and unprofessional medical practices, which often are the only options, for transpersons who wish to opt for Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). The pain, trauma and frustration of those who have gone under the scalpel are mind-numbing and show how far we are from building a gender-equal and inclusive society.

Lastly, Shefali Rafiq from Open Democracy in her article **‘A glimpse into the lives of transgender people in Kashmir’** presents the lives of a cross-section of transpeople, their struggles, their choices and their efforts to live a life of dignity.

It is heartening to note that print, electronic and web media, as well as the film industry, are moving beyond comic relief and human-interest stories to dive deep into the various dimensions of the LGBTQI+ community. The success of Bollywood films **‘Badhai Do’** and **‘Chandigarh Karey Aashiqui’** being two good examples in recent times.

1. Isolated, invisible: LGBTQ scientists talk about their experience at workplace

Priyanka Sahoo | Hindustan Times | June 21st, 2021

Throughout her pre-transition period, A Mani, a mathematician and scientist at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, remained closeted, introverted and preferred working alone.

“Some teachers, colleagues at times did try to say anti-gender diverse stuff to me because I appeared too femme. But I never bothered about them and their degenerate views,” said Mani, one of the very few lesbian trans-women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Collectively, people from sexual minorities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons and their allies are referred to as the LGBTQ+ community. Even as campuses endeavour to create safe spaces for sexual and gender minorities, past trauma, invisibility and discrimination is rife in this marginalised community.

In celebrations to mark the Pride month — which recognises the community’s impact on history locally, nationally, and internationally — HT interviewed LGBTQ+ scientists about their experiences in STEM. A nagging sense of invisibility lingered among all the scientists interviewed by HT.

Visibility matters

While there are no surveys that can ascertain the number of LGBTQ+ scientists in India, community members said there were only few in number. Out of fear of ostracization, many preferred to hide their identities.

“I don’t see any reason why I can’t or shouldn’t openly assert my sexuality now, but because of the stigma and taboo experienced in the past, I don’t feel like going through the process again” said a professor at the Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay (IIT-B), on the condition of anonymity.

While many of his friends and colleagues know that he is gay, this professor has ‘not come out of the closet entirely’.

“So far, I have not received any backlash, but that could be because I have shared my truth with only a selected group of people. I come from a time when discussing sexual orientation and gender identity was absolutely damned. During my school and undergraduate days, I had started to believe that I am the only one in my species. It was not until the beginning

of social media in the early 2000s when I came across support groups discussing LGBTQ+ rights online that I realised the extent of invisibility,” he said.

To address this lack of representation and alienation, this professor and his two friends formed Pravriti — a pan IIT support group for LGBTQ+ members of faculty, students and staff. In 2018, 20 members of Pravriti, excluding the professor, had filed a petition in the Supreme Court against section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalised homosexuality and any ‘unnatural sex’.

“Invisibility itself is at least a two-fold problem, one can invisibilise the LGBTQ+ scientist or invisibilise the LGBTQ+ scientist’s work. Needless to say, both have tremendous impact on the person’s work and mental health. Queer-trans scientists, who are not out, have to deal with constant mental stress of living double lives while dealing with the immense pressure of practising science in formal settings. Even queer-trans scientists who are out are met with discrimination and dismissal,” said Sayantan Datta, a queer-trans science writer, who holds a master’s degree in neural and cognitive sciences from the University of Hyderabad.

Another fallout of the invisibility is that without role models, sexual and gender minority students find STEM less welcoming. Last year, IIT-B renamed its women’s cell – meant for handling sexual harassment complaints – to the gender cell.

“Gender violence can happen to anybody, irrespective of their gender. It sends a message to students of all sexual orientations and gender identities that we see you and your struggles,” said Abhijit Majumder, associate professor and faculty advisor to Saathi, IIT-B’s official LGBTQ+ resource group for students, staff and faculty.

Out and proud, yet isolated

Mani transitioned medically and legally between 2012 and 2014 during her doctoral days. Prior to that, she preferred working independently.

“The very idea of a workplace is rather new to me. Visibility meant that I had to learn to interact. Yes, it takes some effort to get used to. Many people are not aware or are ill-informed. I think that means many people may be avoiding any interaction or that they may be acting against my interests. So, I have to work against the tide,” she said.

Stigma, casual sexism, misgendering, jokes and hidden discriminatory rules aggravate the alienation.

A 2019 survey of 1,000 UK-based physical scientists found that almost 30% of LGBTQ+ scientists and half of transgender scientists said that they had considered leaving their workplace because of an unfriendly or hostile climate or because of discrimination.

Discrimination against women is a symptom that the system of academia is not healthy, said Prajval Shastri, an astrophysicist retired from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru.

“The notion that science is all about merit and everything else — caste and religious lineage, gender and sexual identities — don’t matter is not borne out by evidence. When it comes to women in STEM, there is clear evidence that unconscious bias and hidden norms compromise merit, and institutes must acknowledge that,” said Shastri, who advocates intersectional feminism at academic spaces.

Mental Health

Growing up, Mani experienced gender dysphoria—a psychological distress that results from incongruence between one’s sex assigned at birth and one’s gender identity. Being closeted only added to the distress, and she suffered from depression.

Datta, earlier this year, surveyed 47 people in STEM in India, who are from the LGBTQ+ community. The survey found that 38% of respondents agreed that being LGBTQIA+ in STEM has affected their mental health. Another 38% said that being LGBTQIA+ in STEM may have impacted their mental health, although they were not sure.

While most campuses now have in-house psychologists and counsellors, it is important to have counsellors who are LGBTQ-friendly, said Niruj Mohan Ramanujam, scientist at Indian Institute of Astrophysics.

More than a safe space

On June 17 – marked as the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia – the IIT-B professor came across a homophobic comment made by an international scientist on a global messaging group which he is a part of. The comment was flagged and the scientist was removed from the group, only to be allowed again due to procedural issues. Some members of that global group of scientists also commented that the person had the right to express an opinion, even if it is homophobic.

“Had it been a racist comment, the reaction would have been different. But when it comes to gender and sexual minorities, people are willing to offer a discount to discrimination,” said the professor.

Saathi at IIT-B became one of the first LGBTQ+ support groups at any IIT in 2011. Since then, it has been advocating the creation of an inclusive campus. In 2019, it became an official body with a say in hostel and cultural affairs at the institute.

“With the help of Saathi, we have been able to create a safe space for our LGBTQ+ members on campus. The next step is to make it more welcoming,” said Majumder.

“Sexuality of an individual sometimes evolves with time, and it is a good idea to see such an evolution getting an expressional space in the broad, plural and diversity enriched society,” said Subhasis Chaudhuri, director, IIT-B. However, a lot more needs to be done.

“Specifically for the purpose of making campuses safer and accessible for the LGBTQ community, apart from reservation, it is necessary to increase sensitisation, have related programmes, appoint qualified feminists to help with issues, provide for inclusive healthcare and infrastructure. For example, lesbian research scholars do not get to live with their spouses in special hostels, while other married straight research scholars are permitted to live together. Most non-binary identified people do not have access to gender-neutral toilets,” said Mani, whose research areas include algebra, logic, rough sets, formal approaches to vagueness and allied areas.

The draft science, technology and innovation policy, issued by the ministry of science and technology last December, attempts to correct some of these problems. It proposes to offer spousal benefits to LGBTQ+ community, including retirement benefits to any partner irrespective of their gender.

Many feel that gender and sexuality in STEM spaces and syllabi were invisible. For example, use of the gender-neutral pronouns ‘they’ or ‘ze’ in the academic space. Artificial intelligence (AI), too, can be discriminatory.

“Many AI algorithms are trained on data sets [collected from anywhere] and the results of training are used to make predictions on other situations. Such algorithms can end up learning misogyny and toxic behaviours. People are working in this area to rectify this. Usually, it is not possible to label large data sets and rectify them. Intelligent higher order methods need to be devised,” said Mani.

Need for allies

“Institutions must make it explicit in their advertisements for students and faculty that they are striving to be welcoming of candidates from all caste and gender backgrounds, have bias-trained medical and psychological counsellors, and build unisex toilets,” said Shastri. Diversity and inclusion committees must be set up at institutions, with outside experts, if necessary, she said.

“I believe it to be particularly important that even as all faculty must make it their cause to bring in equity, diversity and inclusion within the workplace, allyship training of the existing STEM members by expert trainers from outside the profession, in order to make the workplace welcoming of LGBTQ+ people, is critical,” said Shastri.

Mani has taken up activism, promoting lesbian rights and the free software movement. *“Within the free software communities, I have helped with codes of conduct in mailing*

lists, other forums, conferences, and have helped in initiating action against people indulging in sexist behaviour and harassment,” she said.

Priyanka Sahoo is a communications professional whose work over a period of seven years has chronicled the intersection of caste, gender and politics in premiere scientific institutions such as IITs and IISc. She has worked with major publications such as The Indian Express, Mumbai Mirror and The Hindustan Times and is currently working at Tata Consultancy Services to tell stories of gender, science and innovation.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/others/isolate-d-invisible-lgbtq-scientists-talk-about-their-experience-at-workplace-101624216113486.html>



2. How Kerala is a long way off in gender affirmative healthcare for transpersons

Jisha Surya | www.behanbox.com | September 6th, 2021



Thiruvananthapuram: Anuradha Govindan of Kannur, 38, waited for thirty years to embrace her identity as a transwoman. Before she was able to live the life she wanted, Govindan used up all her savings from her time as an accountant in Dubai, to fulfil her family commitments— build a family home and get her siblings married.

Seven years ago, with a small sum of Rs 3000 borrowed from a friend, she moved to the neighbouring Kozhikode district to start a new life. But holding a job as a transwoman was not easy.

“After fulfilling my responsibilities, I was finally ready to live my life on my own terms. I started wearing makeup and salwars. Most people, even those who reported to me, ridiculed me”, she said.

Fed up of the discrimination at work, she quit her job as an accountant and began working as a makeup artist. Even though this meant starting from scratch, Govindan worked hard to save up for her sex reassignment surgery (SRS).

“For transgender persons, sex reassignment surgery (SRS) is the only ray of hope”, she told BehanBox. “Because of our facial hair and masculine features, we tend to overdo

makeup to hide them but it ends up looking odd. I didn't even have the confidence to go out for a cup of tea", she adds.

In 2018, Anuradha consulted with doctors at Renai Medicity, a private hospital in Kochi, to begin her procedure for transitioning. A year after starting hormone therapy, Govindan underwent top surgery (breast implant) in 2019 and SRS in May 2020.

28-year-old Anannyyah Kumari Alex started her transitioning process, a month after Govindan. Both chose Renai Medicity and were operated upon by the same team of doctors in May and June 2020 respectively. Both suffered intestinal obstruction with heavy vomiting, a postoperative complication, which left them bedridden for weeks. It took more than six months for them to recover from the complications of 'intestinal vaginoplasty' - a procedure that uses a section of the intestine to create the vagina.

While Govindan lived to tell her tale, Alex who was unable to bear the post-operative physical and mental trauma, died by suicide at her rented apartment in Kochi on July 20, 2020. Unable to bear the loss, her partner Jiju too died by suicide a day after her death.

In the days before her death, Alex had spoken out openly about the trauma of her sex reassignment surgery and against the medical negligence of Renai Medicity.

"I can't laugh or sneeze. When I urinate, it would spray outside the commode. I have to use 8-10 sanitary pads per day. I don't have a single penny to even buy pads," she had explained in a discussion on 'Chromosomes' on Clubhouse, the social media app.

"Medical negligence adds more to our trauma. Why do these people exploit marginalised persons like us?" asked Alex, in an interview with The Cue, an online portal.

Alex's death brings to the fore the several gaps in the provision of gender-affirmative healthcare in Kerala, which include high costs of SRS and transitioning processes and the near total absence of the government in healthcare provision.

Medical Negligence

Anannyyah Kumari Alex had many firsts to her credit. She was the first transgender radio jockey (RJ) in Kerala and the first transwoman to officially anchor the 25th International Film Festival of Kerala held in February and March 2021. In another first, she became the first transgender person to file a nomination to contest the Kerala assembly elections in April 2021. She later withdrew after alleging that the Democratic Social Justice Party (DSJP), a regional party, had backed her to gain publicity and accused its leaders of making sexually abusive comments against her.



Alex was an articulate advocate and activist within the transgender community in Kerala. She had been laying bare the graphic details of her botched surgery in her interviews with several media platforms and the ensuing trauma she had to endure.

"You cannot call my post-surgery private part a vagina. It is like a hacked piece of meat. It looks as if a hole is made on the flesh. I go through excruciating pain every day", she told The Cue.

A day before her death, Alex had her close friend Heidi Saadiya record a video of her ordeal and demanded punitive action against Renai Medicity.

"I need to undergo corrective surgery by an expert doctor. I am a person who sees life in a positive way. But sometimes I feel like ending my life. The doctor and the hospital I chose have thrown me onto the street," she said in the video.

"She was planning for a corrective surgery in Delhi for which we were crowd-sourcing funds", said Saadiya. *"I uploaded the video the next day and within an hour I got a call informing me of her death",* Saadiya told BehanBox.

The surgery and the complications thereafter had left Alex jobless and penniless.

"We knew Anannyah as a well-groomed person who always wore the best clothes and makeup. Complications after the surgery had completely broken her. Pandemic and lockdown situations made matters worse," said Saadiya, who considered Anannyah as her sister.

Botched surgeries are not new but many suffered post-SRS complications in silence. Alex, however, chose to speak against medical negligence and hold the private hospital to account. Many, even within the transgender community, had tried to silence her when she spoke out, fearing that it might sabotage the only available treatment facilities in the state, said a transgender rights activist who requested anonymity.

“Until a few years ago, trans persons had to go to neighbouring states for SRS as it was unavailable in Kerala. Now the state government was providing reimbursement of SRS and hospitals were introducing modern methods”, said the activist. *“While Anannyyah did not have much support initially, we understood the trauma she went through.”*

Govindan herself has not suffered serious post-surgical complications but she is not entirely happy with the outcome.

“We agree to complex surgeries like colon vaginoplasty on the assurance that we could lead a normal sexual life at least for 10 years. I find sexual intercourse very painful”, she said.

Kalamaseery police investigating the death of Anannyyah said that they were not looking into the issue of medical negligence.

“Our scope of the investigation is to check whether it is a suicide or a homicide. Preliminary findings from post-mortem show that it was a case of suicide,” said circle inspector P R Santhosh. He ruled out media reports that post-mortem revealed details of unhealed wounds in Anannyyah’s private parts. *“We haven’t received any such details. If we get any further evidence from the forensic report, we will investigate,”* he said.

Transgender persons who have been left reeling after botched surgeries are not keen to register formal complaints of medical negligence against the hospitals. Renai Medicity ruled out the allegations of medical negligence in a press statement it issued after Alex’s death.

“Anannyyah had faced the issue of intestinal obstruction, a known complication of SRS, around six days after the surgery. It was corrected through a follow-up procedure. Anannyyah was well aware of such complications. When she raised complaints, we suggested another surgery to improve the shape of the genital area. However, she alleged medical negligence and demanded compensation. A medical board ruled out allegations of health complications and medical negligence,” it said.

Dr Arjun Asokan, who led the team of doctors performing the surgery, didn’t reply to BehanBox’s messages seeking his response to the issue.

Expensive Surgeries

When Anuradha Govindan wanted to transition, she had estimated that the surgical process would cost 2 lakh rupees. Till date, she has spent 6 lakh rupees and is deep in debt.

“After I paid Rs 2.15 lakh rupees for SRS, which included 81,000 rupees for top surgery, the hospital demanded an additional Rs 75,000 for a follow-up surgery to correct the complications from the first surgery”, she said. “I was bedridden with only a close friend to support, so naturally I was shocked”, said Govindan. The hospital had not briefed her about the total cost before the surgery.

Additionally, Govindan spends around 10,000 rupees every two to three months for hormonal therapy.

SRS procedures are expensive in Kerala as they are conducted in private hospitals only. Access to government healthcare for SRS is absent in the state.

An ordinary vaginoplasty, a procedure that can construct the vulva and vaginal canal, costs around anywhere between 1 lakh to 1.5 lakh rupees. A more advanced intestinal vaginoplasty, a process that constructs the vaginal canal using the intestine can cost around 2.5 lakh rupees, said Saadiya. For female to male surgeries, breast removal costs around 65,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh rupees, uterus removal around 85,000 to 1.2 lakh rupees and construction of a penis through metoidioplasty or phalloplasty ranges from 2.5 lakh to 4 lakh rupees depending on the complexity of the surgery. Hormonal therapy, which is a continuous process, costs around Rs 500-800 per month for medicines alone.



In 2018, the Government of Kerala announced financial support for SRS for transgender persons. Under the state's financial support scheme, transmen are reimbursed a maximum amount of 5 lakh rupees while the amount is up to 2.5 lakh rupees for transwomen. When the scheme was first introduced, transmen and transwomen were reimbursed equally. The amount was increased from 2 lakhs to 5 lakh rupees for transmen in 2020, after appeals from the trans community that the female to male surgery was more expensive and complicated.

Trans persons undergoing SRS are also entitled to a monthly payment of 3000 rupees for post-operative care, for one year. The government has spent 1.26 crore rupees since 2018 for reimbursement of SRS surgeries according to data obtained from the social justice department by BehanBox.

Since the scheme was introduced, SRS procedures have increased fourfold. 86 trans women and 42 trans men have availed of the financial support since 2018 according to data obtained from the social justice department.

The scheme has brought some relief to the financial burden of transgender persons in the state. Before this scheme, trans persons would flee to the neighbouring states and join the Hijra community, which conducted crude gender change surgeries said Sreemayi S L, a transgender rights activist. These included castration methods such as 'Thayamma Kai', a procedure where the penis and testicles were severed using sharp weapons.

"Others would also approach private hospitals in Nagercoil, Coimbatore and Bangalore, which conducted surgeries at lower prices ranging from Rs 20,000 to Rs 60,000 based on the complexity of the procedure. The facilities for SRS in Kerala began only a few years ago," she said.

However, the state government's financial scheme is a post-operation reimbursement scheme. Trans persons have to organise expensive private surgeries upfront, which is something of a challenge.

"Surgeries are expensive and many raise money through sex work or begging. So, when such surgeries fail, the impact is devastating," Sreemayi told Behanbox. Transgender rights activists believe that trans men experience multiple oppressions, more than trans women, which include patriarchy in addition to transphobia

"However, I see the government scheme to reimburse the cost of SRS as a progressive move. The bigger issue, however, is the stigma associated with SRS", said Saadiya. "As society sees SRS as a wasteful exercise, trans persons are hesitant to file complaints," she said

Lack of Access to Government Healthcare

SRS surgeries in Kerala are monopolised by four private hospitals, said Maya Krishnan, an advocate at Kerala High Court.

In months preceding her death, Alex had been discussing the possibility of taking legal action against the Renai Medicity hospital with Krishnan.

“All the while that we were discussing the option, Anannyah was also contemplating undergoing a corrective surgery at the same hospital”, said Krishnan. “That is the problem with the monopoly. Trans people have no alternatives.”

Gender-affirmative healthcare was not available in the government healthcare system in the state, according to a study conducted by Queerala, an LGBTIQ organisation in 2019. Two years hence, things remain unchanged.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 mandates public healthcare provisions, including sex reassignment surgery and hormonal therapy, for transgender persons. The Act also recommends the publication of a health manual for SRS, in accordance with the guidelines issued by World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH).

Psychiatrist Dr Jithin T Joseph believes that the WPATH guidelines if followed properly, could address major concerns regarding the SRS in the country.

“A set of specialists, including psychiatrist, endocrinologist, plastic surgeon, gastroenterologist, gynaecologist and urologist are involved in the surgery. The WPATH guidelines are issued based on scientific studies, expert opinions and challenges faced by transgender persons”, he told BehanBox.

Though medical practitioners in India are not legally bound to follow the WPATH guidelines, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act recommends formulating guidelines in tune with the WPATH in India, said Dr Joseph.

Private hospitals, in a hurry to cash in on the financial support offered by the government, flouted many of the norms, said Krishnan.

“Around five persons underwent SRS surgery during the time I was admitted to the hospital. I realised that they were cashing in on our desperate urge for a better life”, Govindan told Behanbox. While a consultation with a psychologist was arranged ahead of the surgery according to the norms, it was a routine exercise.

“The psychologist would just ask whether we are ready for the surgery but never talked of its implications in detail”, said Govindan. “In Anannyah’s case, I realised that she was neither given necessary hormone therapy nor the psychological support,” she said.

The first SRS surgery within the government healthcare system was conducted in 2017 at the Government Medical College hospital, Thiruvananthapuram. Sagar, a trans man, filed a complaint with the former Health Minister KK Shailaja and the State Human Rights Commission, about his botched surgery and the mental and physical trauma that he underwent.

“They took my body for their experiment. The doctor I consulted in Mumbai told me that the surgery at the Thiruvananthapuram MCH was not done according to protocol. This in turn led to several complications. The strong antibiotics they gave me for the infection caused further serious health issues,” Sagar said in an interview with Firstpost. Thereafter, SRS procedures were conducted entirely in the private sector.

After Alex’s allegations and her death, Kerala’s social justice minister R Bindu informed the Kerala Assembly that a protocol would be introduced regarding sex reassignment surgeries.

“Government plans to address the issues, including medical complications of SRS, as a matter of immediate concern. The transgender justice board has decided to constitute an expert panel to study the possibility of introducing gender-affirmative healthcare in the government sector and to issue norms according to WPATH guidelines”, she informed the assembly.

M Anjana, director of the Directorate of Social Justice, speaking to Behanbox, said that the government had taken steps to offer gender-affirmative health care in government hospitals. *“The expert panel will also check on the progress of the proposal to set up gender-affirmative health care in government hospitals. The recommendations of transgender members of the transgender justice board too are being considered for follow-up activities,”* she said.

The minister has also ordered the directorate of the social justice department to submit a report on providing health insurance to transgender persons and inclusion in the priority list of Life Mission, the Kerala government’s housing scheme for the homeless.

Transphobia

Kerala became the first state in the country to adopt a Transgender policy in 2015. It was also the year that 18-year-old Heidi Saadiya fled the state after she faced discrimination, after coming out as a transwoman. She was not alone. Most transgender persons would flee to places like Bangalore, Coimbatore or Madurai, where they could live with their identity or even access SRS procedures. Saadiya narrates why she had to flee.

“It was not just the bullying or sexually insulting comments. One of my relatives felt ashamed of the existence of a transgender person in the family, so he contracted a goon to have me killed”, she said. Life outside Kerala was not easy either.

“Though most of us fled the state seeking a better life, the slave culture within the Hijra community was traumatizing. They would destroy our certificates and identity cards, so that we could work as slaves and earn money from begging and sex work,” Saadiya said.



A study conducted by the social justice department of the Kerala government, in 2015 enumerated 25,000 transgender persons in Kerala. Of the 400 transgender persons surveyed, the study found that more than half of them earned less than 5000 rupees a month and only 11.6% of transgender persons had a regular job. Around 58% reported that they dropped out of school before Class X due to severe harassment. The transgender policy aimed to ensure rights to equality, dignity and life without violence, for transgender persons in the state.

Saadiya returned to Kerala in 2017 as the situation improved in the state for trans persons. Alex and Saadiya adopted Renju Renjimar, a transgender activist and makeup artist, as their mother.

“Though Kerala is still a transphobic society, things began improving only after 2018. The transgender policy, announcement of financial support for education and SRS, allotment of short stay homes etc gave visibility to transgender persons”, said Saadiya.

After securing a postgraduate diploma in electronic journalism from the Press Club Institute of Journalism in Thiruvananthapuram, Saadiya had become the first transsexual TV journalist in Kerala when she joined ‘Kairali’, a television channel backed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

“Even in the most progressive newsroom, people wanted to know what was between my legs. I had to quit due to discrimination,” said Saadiya, who now works in a corporate firm.

Though Kerala witnessed changes after the introduction of the transgender policy, the lack of inclusivity in mainstream society is still a major concern. Attempts by the government, such as the Kochi Metro Rail Limited’s job offer for transgender persons, were later dubbed as mere ‘tokenism’.

“Lot of trans persons quit their work due to low pay. Finding accommodation in Kochi was very difficult. Though it was hailed as a progressive measure, there wasn’t much attempt to make the work environment more inclusive,” said Saadiya. Saadiya asks society to view the issue of SRS against the backdrop of transphobia.

“Had the society accepted transgender persons in their true identity, many might not have opted for a surgery. Surgery gives us confidence, visibility and independence. After going through so many struggles in life, all we want is some inner peace and happiness,” Saadiya said.

Changing Times

Alex, in her lifetime and after her death, has raised several questions on a range of issues such as transphobia, gender-affirmative healthcare, police atrocity towards transgender persons, sexual abuse and skewed portrayal of transgender persons in popular culture. She had even questioned the slavery-like system within the Hijra culture which she was part of, during a brief period in 2012.

As a child, Alex was forced into meditation exercises in various churches by her family to change her ‘feminine nature’. Only a few years ago, she mended the broken relationship with her father, who had opposed her transition earlier.

In a major deviation from the practices of Semitic religions, her parish St. Joseph’s Roman Catholic church, Mundackal in Perumon, Kollam district, performed her funeral rites in her chosen name ‘Anannyah Kumari Alex’, a sign of changing times.

Jisha Surya is a Kerala-based journalist with over 14 years of experience in journalism having worked at The New Indian Express, and The Times of India and as an independent journalist who has contributed regularly to major news portals such as The Newsmminute, Onmanorama, TOI Plus, Behanbox, The Quint, Boomlive and Indiaspend. She is currently working as a special correspondent at News9.

<https://behanbox.com/2021/09/06/how-kerala-is-a-long-way-off-in-gender-affirmative-healthcare-for-trans-persons/>



3. A glimpse into the lives of transgender people in Kashmir

Shefali Rafiq | www.opendemocracy.net | December 21st, 2021

Despite ongoing discrimination and restricted life options, there are signs of hope for the transgender community, especially among the younger generation.



Manu Bebo is among the few in the Kashmir Valley who openly identifies as a transwoman | Shefali Rafiq. All rights reserved

On a cold winter's evening, Reshma was the centre of attention in a room full of women in the city of Srinagar in Indian-administered Kashmir.

Reshma, who is a transgender, combed their short hair, took out an orange-coloured *dupatta* (long scarf) and a few anklets from their bag and put them on. They were about to sing at a wedding ceremony, something Reshma, now 55, has been doing since their youth.

Afterwards, Reshma folded the *dupatta*, removed their anklets, draped a shawl around their shoulders and left for home. Reshma is part of Kashmir's transgender community, which numbers over 4,000.

The conflict-ridden Kashmir Valley is a bone of contention between nuclear neighbours India and Pakistan, both of which lay claim to it. The two countries have fought three wars over the Muslim-majority region since the partition of India in 1947.

Despite the region's conservative outlook, transgender women have long been accepted as matchmakers and as performers at wedding ceremonies, which has provided them with a source of livelihood for decades.



Reshma, surrounded by women, singing at the wedding | Shefali Rafiq

Farah Qayoom, a sociologist and assistant professor at the University of Kashmir, said that transgender involvement in marriages is a decades-old phenomenon – in urban areas, at least. In more orthodox rural areas, this is ‘very rarely seen’.



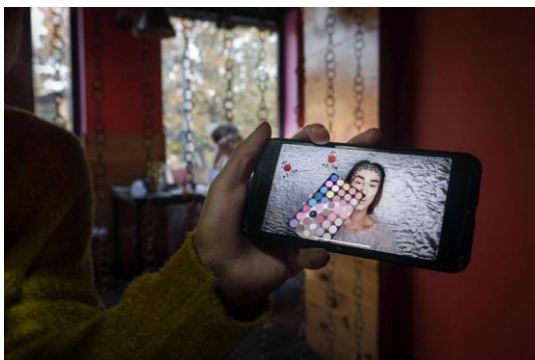
Reshma getting ready to perform at a wedding ceremony in Srinagar, Kashmir | Shefali Rafiq

Also, women are more accepting of matchmaking by transgender people, according to Qayoom. “*Their interaction with women is not seen in a negative way; this could be a reason that they engage in matchmaking without much hassle,*” she added.



Manu talking with a friend in a café in Srinagar | Shefali Rafiq

Social media has also played a role in normalising their participation. Inviting Reshma and her companions to sing and dance at weddings has become a status symbol in Kashmir, she believes.



Manu keeps up with her followers on Instagram. Here, she shows one of her make-up videos | Shefali Rafiq

Reshma has attained celebrity status and videos of their singing have garnered thousands of views on social media. But their journey to fame has come at a cost. *“In my early days of singing, I would get beaten by my family for singing, playing with girls and even growing my hair,”* Reshma said.

“I always wanted to look like a girl. But I would have been killed if I had done that openly,” they said while showing photographs from their younger days with long hair and make-up.



Reshma showing some of their old photographs | Shefali Rafiq

Change for the younger generation

While older members of the transgender community only show their true identity at weddings, the younger generation seems to be breaking the shackles of patriarchy and the conventions of Kashmir's conservative society. They say they are 'proud' of themselves and don't need to rely on a particular job.

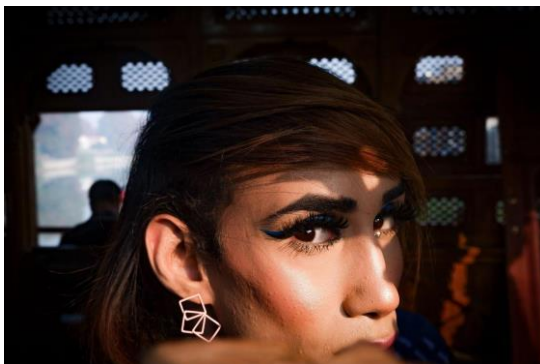
Among this younger generation is Manzoor Ahmad, 21, who goes by the name of Manu Bebo and is among the few in the Valley who openly identifies as a transwoman. She works as a make-up artist.



Manu poses for a photograph in Srinagar | Shefali Rafiq

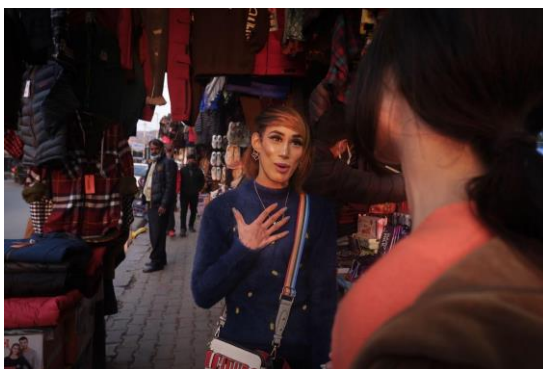
She carries herself confidently and doesn't mind the attention she receives while in public. This is something that is lacking among the older community members, who, she says, are 'bound by religion and society'.

Manu was about 13 when she first realised that she was ‘different’. She was scolded by her parents for ‘being girly’ and was often lectured by the elder members of her community who saw her ‘behaviour’ as a sin.



Portrait of Manu | Shefali Rafiq

However, like other Srinagar transwomen, Manu has always been a bit rebellious. *“I would tell them, it’s my life. The people who are talking about my clothes haven’t bought them for me. These are my clothes and I can wear whatever I want to,”* she said, laughing.



Manu meeting a fan in Srinagar market, who asked to take a selfie with her | Shefali Rafiq

Reshma’s experience was different. They said they were not bold enough when younger to wear the kind of clothes they wanted, *“Back then, it was not possible. We could not do that. We had responsibilities on our shoulders and we had to stay within our limits.”*

Meanwhile, Manu has not only grown very popular on social media but is determined to realise her dream of getting married, *“While I am not in a relationship now, boys are crazy about me,”* she said, as young men gathered around wanting to take selfies with her.

However, for Reshma, this is unimaginable. *“I couldn’t have even thought of something like that,”* they said, referring to getting married or settling down with a partner.



Reshma poses for a picture, wearing a simple kurta shalwar with a broad shawl over their shoulder | Shefali Rafiq

Discrimination and stigma

Reshma was recently forced to publicly apologise when a famous cleric issued a decree to ‘maintain distance from the community’, after a video of Reshma reciting verses from the Qur’an while playing a musical instrument (some people believe music is haram – forbidden) during a marriage ceremony went viral.

They received abuse on social media, *“It took a strong toll on my mind, and I was confined to my house for many days,”* Reshma said.

Manu’s journey to freedom has not been easy either. But, despite all the constraints and stigma towards her community, Manu manages to live freely as a transwoman. *“I feel like I am a girl. That is, it,”* she proclaimed. *“I don’t give a fuck about anything else. Before, I would get scared to upload my pictures, but not anymore.”*



Manu: 'I want my make-up on point, always.' | Shefali Rafiq

Aijaz Bund is head of the department of social work at a government college in the district of Pulwama. He founded the NGO Sonzal Welfare Trust with some community members, to build a supportive framework for the transgender community in Kashmir.

He describes himself as the first and the only activist working for the rights of the LGBTQI community in Kashmir and blames the patriarchal society for setting limits – for everyone.



Aijaz Bund, the only activist in Kashmir fighting for LGBTQI rights | Shefali Rafiq

Bund realised the discrimination that transgender people face in 2008 when a transwoman came to arrange his sister's marriage. *"They weren't even allowed to enter our home. I somehow convinced my mother to let them in. My mother washed each tea cup three times after they had left,"* he said.

Bund said that almost every transgender person in Kashmir has faced violence at some point – whether physical or mental. Usually, ‘the first bully’ they encounter is within their own family.

“It all starts with the family, who force the trans person to perform in a ‘normative’ way. If they don’t do it, the family starts abusing them physically and mentally,” he explained.



Reshma at their house in Srinagar | Shefali Rafiq

Being religious and transgender

Many transgender people in Kashmir believe that they shouldn’t change their bodies. A small percentage, however, take hormones or have sex-change operations.

According to 51-year-old matchmaker Babloo, who is trans and whose home is a meeting point for the local transgender community, Islam does not permit alterations to the body.



Babloo poses for a photograph at their house in Srinagar | Shefali Rafiq

Unlike Manu, Babloo does not usually wear women's clothing in public and, as with many of the older generation, dresses up only on special occasions such as weddings. *"As soon as I reach home, I make sure to look like a man again."*

Although homosexuality is deemed a sin, both major schools of thought of Islam have declared gender reassignment surgery acceptable. Nevertheless, globally many transgender Muslims suffer rejection, socially and culturally, after reassignment surgery.

However, for Kashmir's transgender community, there is a small ray of hope. Local cleric Ahmad Syed Shah Al-Qasmi told openDemocracy that in Islam there is no scope for discrimination on any basis. *"Transgender people have equal rights. Their discrimination is unfortunate, and it is the fault of society that we have failed to stop the discrimination against them."*



Manu in a café in Srinagar | Shefali Rafiq

As for young Manu, she believes that her body is hers to decide what to do with. *"I would definitely change whatever I want in my body. It's my body and I can do anything with it."*

Shefali Rafiq is a multimedia journalist whose work focuses on gender, human rights, culture and society. Her work has been featured in renowned publications like Foreign Policy, The Christian Science Monitor, Open Democracy, ARTnews and others. Shefali is currently working on a project that revolves around acid attack survivors.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/transgender-people-in-kashmir/>



Underpaid, Undervalued

Female labour force participation is one of the most important drivers of socioeconomic growth and indicates the potential of a country to grow rapidly. While India, on one hand, is considered by many experts to be a rapidly-growing economic powerhouse; on the other hand, unfortunately, it is one of the poorest performers in terms of women's participation in the labour force, with a female labour participation rate of 20%, marginally higher than a war-torn Afghanistan.

An article in Economist states that if only India was to rebalance its workforce, the world's biggest democracy would be 27% richer. (Source - *Why India Needs women to Work, Economist, 05/07/2018*). It further says that women contribute one-sixth of economic output, which is among the lowest shares in the world and half the global average. Though women contribute significantly to agriculture, they remain unrecognized as such and their rights on the land are often denied to them. This deep-seated patriarchal thinking was reflected in the observation of the Chief Justice of India suggesting that women, along with the elderly and children, should not participate in the farmers' protests, thus denying women their identity as farmers and their right to protest.

Hrushikesh Patil in his engrossing piece titled, **'En route Delhi, Kasturbai resolves to continue fighting for her land'**, chronicles the story of Kasturbai, a 65-year-old farmer from Surwali Budruk from Bhodwal Taluka of Jalgaon, Maharashtra. Diving into her perspective as she travels across the breadth of the nation to participate in the Kisan Andolan on the border of Delhi to assert her rights for her 'Saat Baara' (Land-ownership proof).

The plight of women and transpeople in the sex trade was particularly heart-wrenching, with the stigma attached to their work and lack of recognition as workers denying them access to food, livelihoods, medical care etc. In **'From debt to depression, the pandemic has hit India's sex workers hard'**, Raksha Kumar weaves the narrative from the length and breadth of the country, of one of the worst-hit communities in her story. As she details the exploitation, lack of access to credit facilities and rations, and the rampant spread of misinformation faced by India's sex workers, combined with their inability to transition to other means to earn their livelihoods.

Furthermore, the reverse migration during the pandemic has impacted the availability of work for women in the agricultural sector. Shreya and Geeta dwell on this issue in their article **'Women farmers are losing jobs, earnings, savings even as agriculture booms'**, providing a detailed analysis of the imbalanced growth of the agriculture sector.

While the opportunities for women to contribute to the nation have evolved over time, there has been an almost immovable ceiling when it comes to the armed services. This is something Jahid Khan unravels in his article, **'ज़रूरत, महिलाओं को और ज़्यादा मौक़ा देने की**

है'. In his article, Jahid reports on decision by the Supreme Court, in the contempt petition case against the army, for delaying permanent commission to a number of women officers, after the landmark judgement of the Supreme Court directing it to do so in February 2020. Additionally, providing critical context on the battle for justice for these women, who bravely risk their lives for the country, yet fail to be treated equally.

Lastly, with 'पश्चिम बंगाल के चाय बागानों में अपने बच्चों को खोती माएं' Sadhika Tiwari paints a poignant picture of how motherhood is often a violent involuntary sacrifice for women at the lowest economic strata. As she reports on the reality of the poetically depicted tea gardens of Darjeeling. And how, most oftentimes, its women who suffer the most to ensure industrial output.

There is a need to explore the lives and challenges of working women in the highest corporate positions to women in the most menial and exploitative jobs and unravel the underpinnings of patriarchy that side-lines their concerns.

4. En route Delhi, Kasturabai resolves to continue fighting for her land

Hrushikesh Patil | www.indiejournal.in | January 17th, 2021



“The last time we went to protest, my husband died because of jaundice. This time even if I die in Delhi, I will be happy if my children get something from this protest,” Kasturabai Balu Surale, 65, said with a smile on her face when she was asked about the chilling temperatures and pollution of Delhi and how would she deal with it.

Kasturabai is from a small village Surwali Budruk from Bhodwal Taluka of Jalgaon, Maharashtra. She works as a landless labourer in other people’s fields and has been fighting for her land since 1982. *“A. R. Antulay was the chief minister at that time, we had protested throughout Jalgaon and were put in jail for a month,”* she said while proudly showing her ‘Shetkari Sangharsh Samiti’'s badge.

Tens of thousands of farmers are protesting at three different sites along the borders of Delhi, the national capital, against the three farm laws pushed through by the central government in September last year. To express their support and also solidarity, especially in light of the recent remarks of the Chief Justice of India suggesting that women, along with the elderly and children, should not participate in the protests, on January 15th and January 16th, about 1,300 farmers, mostly women, boarded a train from Satara and Jalgaon to participate in the jatha going all the way to Delhi. Kasturabai is one of the 1,300 protesting women farmers from Maharashtra who are joining the Kisan Andolan in Delhi. She works as a landless labourer in fields of cotton, Jawhar, Chawali, Mug and Udid according to the seasons. *“We are daily wage labourers; a male labourer gets Rs 200 a*

day and we women get only Rs 100. My entire family is dependent on it, since my husband's death. It's not at all enough."

Kasturabai had earlier also participated in the Kisan Long March in 2018. She was amongst thousands of others who marched from Nashik to Mumbai demanding land rights under the Forest Rights Act. Most of the protesting farmers belonged to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes communities. The then chief minister of Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnis of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had promised that protesting farmers will get land rights.

However, Kasturabai has not received the 'Saat Baara' (Land- Ownership proof) of her land yet. *"Girish Mahajan and Devendra Fadnis had promised us land after Kisan Long March but only some of the Adivasis from Nashik have received it, the rest are still landless. I have two daughters, one of whom is a widow, she stays with me and works as a labourer, she has two kids as well. On top of that because of the Coronavirus pandemic, our wages were cut to half. It's really unfortunate that we have to spend our entire life fighting for our very own land, but we won't stop, this fight is about our existence"* she said.

Umaji Uttam Bhilla, another villager from Mukta village in Bhodwal taluka, Jalgaon district is joining the protest to demand land rights under the Forest Rights act as well. *"I have been farming in Borgaon-Shivar since 2003. On January 3rd this year, the forest department came and destroyed our huts, yield, and threatened us with arrests,"* he says with tears in his eyes. *"I have plantations of Cotton, Mango, Lemon, Custard Apples, but they (forest department) destroyed everything, they had pistols, they even took our identification papers."* Umaji belongs to the Bhilla community which is categorised as a Scheduled Tribe.

Umaji and Kasturabai are both a part of the 'jatha' from Jalgaon with around 1,300 protesting farmers, most of whom are landless labourers with a similar plight. As the weather starts getting colder at the junction of Bina in Madhya Pradesh, Kasturabai covers herself with a blanket and poses for a photo, much to the delight of the entire train compartment.

Prashant Patil is a freelance journalist who has published his works in Indie Journal, People's Archive of Rural India, NewsClick and Let India Breathe. He covers climate change, environmental disasters and human rights and wants to focus on the aspect of social justice in the context of climate change.

<https://www.indiejournal.in/article/en-route-delhi-kasturabai-resolves-to-continue-fighting-for-her-land>



5. From debt to depression, the pandemic has hit India's sex workers hard

Raksha Kumar | The Hindu | July 4th, 2021



Sunita lives with her husband and son in a tiny room in a crowded Mumbai slum. Tin sheets make up the walls. A thin bedsheet, tightly tied across the room, acts as a partition between the kitchen and the rest of the house. Outside, a few yards away, is a common bathroom, which more than 200 people in the slum use. *“Living here makes me anonymous. Mostly, I like that,”* she says. Sunita has never invited her clients home.

Now, however, Sunita, whose sex work supports 11 members of her family back home in Bihar, has no other choice. With lodges closed and all local transport shut down over the past four months, she has been forced to bring home the only two clients she could retain. *“My neighbours stare at me every time I step out,”* she says, but her bigger fear is that the landlord might ask her to vacate.

Sunita is one of nine lakh female sex workers in India, according to the National AIDS Control Organisation, a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Of the 62,137 transgender persons in 17 States, 62% also engage in sex work. Sex work has almost come to a standstill since March 2020; the pandemic has hit the community hard and in multiple ways. Everything from debt and depression to the risk of contracting COVID-19 plagues sex workers in the country.

On June 2 every year, International Sex Workers' Day is marked with some sort of celebration by sex workers' collectives. *“This year, we had no energy or enthusiasm to*

celebrate,” says Sunita, who has since reached out to sex workers’ unions so that she can claim some of the government benefits and entitlements that are on offer.

Financially vulnerable

Last year, the Supreme Court directed State governments to supply dry rations to sex workers without insisting on identity documents. The Court was hearing a PIL filed by the Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee (DMSC), the country’s oldest sex workers’ collective. The PIL came soon after an extensive study by a Pune-based non-profit, Asha Care Trust, which works in Budhwar Peth, India’s third-largest red-light area, which houses nearly 3,000 commercial sex workers. The study found that more than 85% of sex workers had taken loans during the pandemic. The study, which included responses from 300 commercial sex workers in Pune, also found that 98% of them took loans from brothel owners, managers and moneylenders, making them financially vulnerable.

Beena, 24, a sex worker in Delhi, has a debt of ₹1,10,000. *“Even if I begin to earn the amount I used to earlier, it will take me two years to repay the debt,”* she says. She has not earned a rupee in the past two months. Since Beena has no address proof, she cannot access loans easily, so she borrowed money from her brothel owner.

One of the biggest hurdles sex workers have faced during the second wave of the pandemic is access to vaccination. Not only are vaccines not available, they are prey to the abundant misinformation. Sunita had the opportunity to get a jab but chose not to; she says some people in her neighbourhood had told her it could lead to blood clots and tumours. A Bengaluru-based worker in her 60s tells me that she got her first dose but did not go back for the second because she had severe cramps and joint pains after the first jab. *“My sathis at Karnataka Sex Workers Union kept pushing me to go, but I was too scared,”* she says.

Vaccinating sex workers should be a priority, especially for those with ailments such as STDs, says Meena Seshu, founder of Sangli-based Sangram. *“Vaccination camps should be organised close to where the women live as they seldom step outside the red-light area,”* she says.

Misinformation epidemic

Ayeesha Rai of the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW), a collective of five million sex workers across the country, says that some of the women believe COVID-19 will not affect them. *“That’s what they thought about HIV back in the day,”* she says. The network is pushing hard to create awareness about the pandemic and about the importance of vaccines. There is much fake news going around on social media and WhatsApp, says Rai.

In the first week of June, NNSW wrote to the Delhi government demanding better access to vaccines for sex workers and transgender people. In early June, around 200 transgender

people and sex workers got the jab at a temporary camp in Gurugram. Around the same time, some 1,300 sex workers in Mumbai's Kamathipura were also vaccinated. *"Although many sex workers do not have identification documents, we are going ahead with vaccinations,"* says Makrand Dagadkhair, assistant commissioner of Mumbai's E ward. Since most red-light areas are populated with undocumented migrants, it complicates aid delivery mechanisms.

Many sex workers live with co-morbidities, which puts them at a greater risk. *"Several people are also immunocompromised as they live with HIV,"* says Seshu. Rinnu is a sex worker in Hanuman Tekdi, a red-light area in Maharashtra's Bhiwandi, with 350 to 400 residents. She has not bought her HIV/AIDS medication for six months now. *"When I make any money, I spend it on food,"* she says. HIV medicines can cost up to ₹5,000 a month.

Every evening, Rinnu sits on a bed outside her one-room house to talk to her neighbour, Damini. Rinnu has seen her friend grow pale in the past few months. Her friend, a trans woman, has had sex reassignment surgery and needs many more drugs. In February, Rinnu was rushed to a local hospital as Damini experienced extreme pain in her stomach. *"But the doctor asked us to leave as he had other patients to see,"* she says. Another matter of concern is the growing alcohol and drug dependency among those in the community, which has compounded the mental health issues faced by some sex workers, many of whom are reporting depression and suicidal tendencies.

In April 2020, the Delhi Commission for Women took *suo motu* cognisance of the 'inhuman conditions' in brothels situated on G.B. Road. It sought information on the availability of food and personal hygiene materials in the area. Beena, however, says she has not seen any change in living conditions in the area in over a year.

Unviable work

Among larger collectives such as DMSC, the women have taken matters into their own hands. They check the temperature and screen customers for symptoms when they enter the red-light district in Kolkata. And members clean and sanitise the room after their customers leave.

The National Human Rights Commission, in an advisory in October 2020 on the rights of women in the context of COVID-19, directed the Central and State governments to enable sex workers to access welfare schemes under the category of 'informal workers. That fell on deaf ears, says Rai. The existing laws in India criminalise aspects of sex work, including soliciting, brothels and living off the earnings of sex work. *"What is left?"* asks Rai. Such laws lead to sex workers being repeatedly raided and taken to shelter homes.

Some of Beena's friends have decided to opt for other kinds of work to save themselves from starvation. One sells vegetables, another is now a domestic help. *"I find it ironic that*

these women, who had to get into sex work because they could not find any other job, today find that sex work is not viable anymore,” says Beena.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria allocated \$10 million to serve the needs of vulnerable communities such as transgender people and sex workers in India. *“This would ensure each of the four-lakh people [formally identified as sex workers] entitled would get about ₹1,500,”* says Seshu. But the fund is caught in bureaucratic red tape. *“I have seen women die waiting for that ₹1,500,”* says Seshu.

Stop-gap measure

In what seems like a parallel world, sex workers like Bengaluru-based Kavya have been earning three times what they used to before the pandemic. In May, she earned ₹60,000. *“With that, I bought an iPhone,”* she says. Buying fancy phones is not an indulgence for Kavya, it is an investment. Most of Kavya’s customers seek phone sex or internet sex and that is how her earnings have grown.

Kavya lives in a middle-income neighbourhood in Bengaluru. She has a room to herself on the terrace, where her parents seldom disturb her. It began when she was introduced to some chatrooms on Telegram by her friends. *“I encounter all kinds of men. Many make me feel unsafe,”* she says. But the pandemic ensures that she limits her interaction to the screen. This lends a layer of security. Sex work is a stop-gap arrangement for her. Kavya dreams of studying law at a foreign university and wants to save up money for it. She says she would love to use a law degree to help sex workers get their due recognition.

Kavya lies on her bed and scrolls through a news article about sex workers in New Zealand on her phone. Her eyes light up when she reads that in New Zealand, sex workers are entitled to an emergency wage subsidy. This subsidy is for all workers whose earnings have fallen by at least 30% due to the pandemic.

“If we recognise sex work as work in this country, then we can avail such benefits too,” she says. *“But we have a long way to go.”*

*Names of sex workers changed to protect privacy.

Raksha Kumar is a freelance journalist, with a specific focus on human rights, land and forest rights. Since 2011, she has reported from 12 countries across the world and a hundred districts in India for outlets such as The New York Times, BBC, the Guardian, TIME, Foreign Policy, South China Morning Post and The Hindu.

<https://www.thehindu.com/society/from-debt-to-depression-the-pandemic-has-hit-indias-sex-workers-hard/article35113988.ece>



6. Women farmers are losing jobs, earnings, savings even as agriculture 'booms'

Shreya Raman, Geeta Devi | www.indiaspend.com | September 10th, 2021



Mumbai, Ayodhya, Mahoba: *"A day's farm work pays about Rs 250 but women earn even less, sometimes around Rs 100. But now that those who work in the cities are back, women's daily earnings are almost down to Rs 50,"* said Kranti Azad, 27, a farmer from Devlaha village in Ayodhya, 135 km east of Lucknow. Like Azad, millions of women for whom agriculture is the only source of income in rural India are now struggling with diminished savings and lost livelihood opportunities.

Though the pandemic led to a recession in India, agriculture has managed to grow, with the Reserve Bank of India describing the sector as the 'bright spot' in the economy. But despite undiminished farm output, agricultural jobs and income have fallen with an increase in disguised unemployment, say experts.

Why is this happening? The nationwide lockdown announced in March 2020 led to an exodus of millions of migrant workers from cities to villages, adding to India's overpopulated and agriculture-reliant rural economy. This employment crisis has disproportionately affected women farm workers in rural India, show ground reports from Uttar Pradesh.

Women in rural India have few employment options, except for erratic and low-paid farm jobs, as we reported in April 2019. Over decades, India has been witnessing a

‘feminisation’ of agriculture - that is, increased participation of women. More than three-quarters (75.7%) of women in rural India are engaged in agriculture, as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, 2019-20). Within the sector, there has also been an increase in the number of women who take on work on farms owned by others and a decline in the number of female owner-farmers.

In this story, IndiaSpend and Khabar Lahariya report from Ayodhya and Mahoba in Uttar Pradesh on how reverse migration and increased availability of employable men in villages led to a drop in the demand for women farm workers in migration source states.

Loss of income, depleting savings

In Ayodhya's Devlaha village, Kranti, 25, lives with her parents and works on a small plot owned by her father. Since the produce is barely enough to feed the family, she also works on other farms in the village. Since the 2020 lockdown, she has not been able to find much work.

"Last year, when the lockdown was announced, men who were working in the cities returned home and they took up the farm work that we did," she said. "We had to sit at home with no income." Monthly expenses for her family of three add up to nearly Rs 5,000 but Kranti manages to earn only around half that. With no income and a rise in expenses caused by inflation and medical expenses incurred during the pandemic, Kranti had to use up what little her family had saved in the past.

Every woman farmer we spoke to told us a similar story.

In southern UP's Mahoba district, Chandi Bai works on her family's 10-*bigha* farm in Ladpur village. She also augments her income by working as a farm worker for hire. Chandi Bai complained about reduced demand for labour and a fall in wages. *"When the migrant workers returned, others in the village stopped getting labour work,"* she told Khabar Lahariya. *"Earlier we earned Rs 200-250, but now it is less."*

Chandi Bai and her family are struggling to survive because they do not have enough savings. *"How can I save? Just vegetables for a single meal cost up to Rs 50,"* she said. Kunwar Bai, 50, a farmer from Ladpur, said that she and other women are often turned away by farm owners who choose to employ male migrant returnees instead. Reverse migration has also meant a fall in remittances and increased expenses, we found. No other opportunities

"The farming system in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where a large number of migrant workers originate from, is dependent on remittances," said Ranu Bhogal, director of policy, Research & Campaigns, at Oxfam India, a not-for-profit organisation. *"With the lockdown and the sudden drop in remittances, there was a significant cash crunch."*

Kranti Azad's household has 10 members, a few of whom were working in cities till the lockdown was announced last year. Their return meant that she had to take on more

housework even as the family income fell. The household's monthly expenses are now Rs 7,000 but its total earnings do not cross Rs 4,000.

"Returnee migrants certainly affected the employment opportunities of women, more so for those who depended entirely on agriculture for wage labour," said Seema Kulkarni, a member of the national facilitation team at Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM), an informal forum that focuses on the rights of women farmers. Return migration also meant that families did not need to hire labour--they had enough cultivators within their families.

Even among women, it is those who are single who have been left more vulnerable by this crisis, reported Kulkarni.

Disguised unemployment

The agriculture sector grew by 3.4% and witnessed record foodgrain production and exports despite the downturn, but this did not result in increased farm incomes, as we said. Employment in agriculture increased by 7.9% (11 million) between March 2020 and June 2020. This increased by another 1.3 million by September 2020--a total increase of 10.6% from a year ago. In July 2021, 11.2 million more people were employed in agriculture.

Although a spike in farm jobs in July is normal due to the sowing season, the rise this year in this month nearly crossed the average 8-12 million jobs range, as per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), a business information company that is monitoring employment trends in India through its Consumer Pyramids Household Survey. But, these numbers hide the disguised unemployment in agriculture--many of its workers are not gainfully employed, said Mahesh Vyas, chief executive officer of CMIE in an interview with IndiaSpend in August.

Madhura Swaminathan, professor and head of the economic analysis unit at the Indian Statistical Institute and chairperson of the not-for-profit trust, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), echoed this view. *"A large number of men have leased land and are self-employed because they don't have any non-agricultural jobs in towns and cities,"* she said, *"Here, the number of days you are working are rarely counted. You have nothing else to do, so you go and work on the field every day."*

Nearly 60% of the employed women in India are engaged in agriculture, as per the 2019-20 Periodic Labour Force Survey. *"Women work the hardest in our country and I use the word 'work' very deliberately, where I distinguish work from employment. Women are most likely doing three shifts. They are working in the fields, they are working at home--taking care of children and old people--and running the house,"* said Vyas of CMIE. *"So, they're doing great work but they are not fruitfully employed."*

Access to credit, markets

During the lockdown last year, women farmers earned less because they had trouble selling their crops. More than 90% of the women surveyed in five Bihar districts for an Oxfam India study conducted between June and September 2020 said that they lost access to the market because there was no transport. Nearly a quarter of the 711 women farmers surveyed in a MAKAAAM study conducted in May 2020 said the same and added that they could not afford the high cost of transport. Nearly 36% of the 352 women who had taken loans in the previous year were not able to repay them.

As savings dried up with little to no income, the lack of access to credit also impacted women farmers. This made it hard for them to invest back into farming or livestock. The second wave's impact has been largely caused by the disease itself. Women farmers were not able to access the kind of credit that was available during the first wave, said Kulkarni of MAKAAAM. *"Nobody was willing to give any kind of cash benefit to women farmers as there was no guarantee that the person would live [to repay the loans]."* For women, gold and backyard poultry are wealth, added Kulkarni. *"Every year, they keep pawning their gold because money has to be pumped back into the fields. Usually, there is some recovery and they are able to get back some of what they mortgage. This year, because they said they have been facing these problems for over a year, they have absolutely no wealth to mortgage or pawn."*

In the Bihar study, nearly 44% of the respondents said that they had taken a loan in the last six months and personal jewellery was the collateral in 87% of the cases.

Lack of data, access to government schemes

While anecdotal accounts highlight the struggles faced by women farmers, limited data and studies make it hard to comprehend the extent of the impact nationwide, said experts. *"Most studies are household-based, they speak to the head of the household who will be a man,"* said R. Ramakumar, economist and professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. *"These surveys don't ask questions on intra-household inequalities, differences in outcomes and so on."*

As most women farmers do not own land, they do not have access to government schemes and other benefits. Only 10% of the respondents in the Bihar study reported having availed loan under the Kisan Credit Card scheme and over half (50.4%) have not received any assistance under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana.

The impact of the pandemic on agriculture and women farmers will be long-lasting though it is not apparent right now said, experts. *"Agriculture is not just about sowing and harvesting. It is also about investing in the land and regularly developing the land,"* said Bhogal of Oxfam, *"The situation may impact farming in many ways--for example, farmers may reduce the amount of fertilisers being added as they become more expensive."*

Loan burdens will continue this year, predicted Swaminathan, *"It is not a one-time effect. With incomes down to zero, how else will the households manage consumption? There will also be an impact on the input costs."*

Shreya Raman is an independent data journalist reporting on gender, health and public policy. She has received the Likho Award for Excellence in Media, Global Nutrition and Food Security Reporting Fellowship, Spotlight Media Fellowship and a Tableau Equal Measures 2030 Fellowship. Her reports have been published in Behanbox, IndiaSpend, The Third Pole, and Scroll.in, The Quint, Business Standard and others.



Geeta Devi is the Chief Reporter and heads the Uttar Pradesh news bureau at Khabar Lahariya, India's only women-run brand of ethical and independent rural news. Her reports on the environment, climate justice and resilience, migration, and investigative pieces have received widespread recognition.

<https://www.indiaspend.com/agriculture/why-women-farmers-are-losing-jobs-earnings-savings-even-as-agriculture-booms-773953>



7. ज़रूरत, महिलाओं को और ज़्यादा मौक़ा देने की है

Jahid Khan | Dainik Hint | 26th November, 2021

सेना में स्थायी कमिशन के लिए लंबे अरसे से कानूनी लड़ाई लड़ रही महिला अफ़सरों को आखिरकार उनका हक़ मिल गया है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट की तरफ़ से अवमानना की कार्रवाई की चेतावनी के बाद, सेना ने अपना एतराज वापस ले लिया है। जस्टिस डी वाई चंद्रचूड़ और ए एस बोपन्ना की बेंच के सामने इस मसले पर हाल ही में एक अवमानना याचिका दाखिल हुई थी। जिसमें गुहार लगाई गई थी कि अदालत के फ़ैसले के बाद भी सेना ने कई महिला अधिकारियों की फ़ाइल रोके रखी है। लंबी प्रक्रिया के बाद भी चौहदह अधिकारियों की फ़ाइल अब भी अटकी है। तीन को स्वास्थ्य आधार पर खारिज किया गया है। जबकि ग्यारह अफ़सर को पुराने सर्विस रिकॉर्ड और दूसरे आधार पर रोका गया है। मामले की जब सुनवाई शुरू हुई, तो अदालत ने इस पर कड़ा एतराज जताया। सेना की तरफ से पेश एडिशनल सॉलिसीटर जनरल ने अपनी दलीलों से अदालत को आश्वस्त करने की कोशिश की। लेकिन बेंच का यह कहना था कि जिन महिलाओं को पहले अनुशासनात्मक अनुमति मिल चुकी है, उन्हें नए आधार पर उनके अधिकार से वंचित नहीं किया जा सकता। पीठ ने स्पष्ट तौर पर कहा कि यह सुप्रीम कोर्ट की अवमानना का मामला है। सेना अपनी जगह पर सर्वोच्च है। लेकिन जब मामला संवैधानिक अधिकारों की रक्षा का हो, तो सुप्रीम कोर्ट ही सर्वोच्च है। अदालत के कड़े रुख के बाद, सेना ने इस मामले में अपने पहले के रवैये को बदलते हुए, उन 11 महिला अधिकारियों को स्थायी कमिशन देने का वादा किया। यही नहीं जो महिला अफ़सर कोर्ट नहीं आई हैं, उन्हें भी उसने तीन हफ़्ते के अंदर परमानेंट कमिशन देने का आश्वासन दिया। ज़ाहिर है कि सेना में यह महिलाओं की एक और बड़ी जीत है। उसने सरकार को बतला दिया है कि वह यदि ठान ले, तो उसके लिए हर चुनौती आसान है। उसके बढ़ते कदमों को कोई रोक नहीं सकता।

गौरतलब है कि पिछले साल सेना में स्थायी कमीशन देने की मांग कर रही कई महिला शॉर्ट सर्विस कमीशन (एसएससी) अधिकारियों ने सेना द्वारा अपनाए गए मानदंडों में खामियों की ओर इशारा करते हुए, ईसाफ़ के लिए शीर्ष अदालत का दरवाज़ा खटखटाया था। उन्होंने अदालत से स्थायी कमीशन, पदोन्नति और अन्य लाभ के लिए दिए गए निर्देशों को लागू करने की मांग की थी। बहरहाल इस मामले में महिला अधिकारियों की मांग को मंज़ूर करते हुए, पिछले साल फरवरी में दिए अपने एक अहम फ़ैसले में शीर्ष अदालत ने निर्देश दिया था कि सेना में महिला अधिकारियों को कमांड पोस्टिंग सहित स्थायी कमिशन प्रदान किया जाए। अदालत ने उस वक्त केंद्र की शारीरिक सीमाओं की दलील को खारिज करते हुए कहा था कि एसीआर मूल्यांकन का मापदंड व्यवस्थागत भेदभाव है। यह महिलाओं के खिलाफ़ लैंगिक भेदभाव है। एसीआर मूल्यांकन प्रक्रिया से ही यह पता चलता है कि इसमें खामी है और हम इसे अनुचित तथा मनमाना ठहराते हैं। अदालत ने केंद्र को निर्देश दिया था कि तीन महीनों के भीतर सभी सेवारत एसएससी महिला अधिकारियों के नाम पर स्थायी कमिशन के लिए गौर किया जाए, चाहे उन्हें सेवा में 14 साल से अधिक हो गए हो या 20 साल।

अदालत यहीं नहीं रुक गई, बल्कि उसने बड़े तल्लख अलफ़ाज़ों में यहां तक कहा, जिन महिलाओं को स्थायी कमीशन नहीं दिया गया है, वे हमारे पास चैरिटी के लिए नहीं बल्कि अपने अधिकारों के लिए आई हैं। सर्वोच्च न्यायालय ने अपने 137 पेज लंबे फैसले में कहा था, हमें ये स्वीकार करना चाहिए कि हमारे समाज की संरचना पुरुषों द्वारा पुरुषों के लिए तैयार की गई है। इसलिए जो कुछ तंत्र ऊपरी तौर पर हानिरहित दिखाई देते हैं, वे असल में कपटी पितृसत्तात्मक व्यवस्था के लक्षण होते हैं। जब किसी कानून को पुरुष के नजरिये से बनाया गया हो, ऐसे में इसे दो गैर-बराबर लोगों पर बराबर तरीके से लागू करने का दावा करना स्वांग है। समानता का बनावटी रूप संविधान में निहित बराबरी के सिद्धांत पर खरा नहीं उतरता है।

अदालत के इस ऐतिहासिक आदेश के बाद ज़्यादातर महिला अधिकारियों को सेना ने स्थायी कमीशन दे दिया था। लेकिन कुछ महिला अधिकारियों की फ़ाइल अलग-अलग वजह से रोकी हुई थी। सेना के इस उदासीन और गैर जिम्मेवाराना रवैये के खिलाफ़ ग्यारह महिला अधिकारी दोबारा अदालत पहुंच गई और उन्होंने गुहार लगाई कि वह सुप्रीम कोर्ट के आदेश के मानदंड को पूरा करती हैं, लेकिन फ़िर भी उन्हें परमानेंट कमीशन नहीं दिया गया है। ज़ाहिर है कि यह सीधे-सीधे शीर्ष अदालत के आदेश की अवमानना का मामला था, जिसे उसने गंभीरता से लिया। अदालत ने अपने आदेश को एक बार फ़िर दोहराते हुए कहा, जिन महिला अधिकारियों के पास अनुशासनात्मक और विजिलेंस क्लियरेंस है, वह मेडिकल क्राइटेरिया पूरा करने की स्थिति में परमानेंट कमीशन की हक़दार होंगी।

गौरतलब है कि सेना में अफ़सर चाहे पुरुष हों या महिलाएं, उनकी नियुक्ति शॉर्ट टर्म कमीशन में यानी चौहदह साल के लिए की जाती है। अभी तक होता यह रहा है कि चौहदह साल के बाद पुरुष अफ़सरों को तो स्थायी कमीशन दे दिया जाता है, लेकिन महिला अफ़सरों को सेवानिवृत्त कर दिया जाता है। ज़ाहिरा तौर पर यह महिलाओं के साथ लैंगिक भेदभाव है, जो हमारे संविधान के एक बुनियादी सिद्धांत के खिलाफ़ है। संविधान का अनुच्छेद 15 साफ़-साफ़ कहता है कि महिला-पुरुष दोनों को समानाधिकार मिलेंगे और राज्य लिंग के आधार पर उनमें आपस में कोई भेद नहीं करेगा। शिक्षा एवं संवैधानिक अधिकार सभी के लिए बराबर होंगे। वहीं संविधान का अनुच्छेद 16, ये कहता है कि राज्य के अधीन किसी पद पर नियोजन या नियुक्ति से संबंधित विषयों में सभी नागरिकों के लिए अवसर की समता होगी और उनमें भेदभाव नहीं हो सकता। लेकिन सेना में महिलाओं के साथ यह नाइंसाफ़ी बरसों तक जारी रही। इस नाइंसाफ़ी के खिलाफ़ महिलाएं जब अदालत गईं, तो साल 2010 में हाई कोर्ट ने शार्ट सर्विस कमीशन के तहत सेना में आने वाली महिलाओं को पुरुषों की तरह स्थायी कमीशन देने का आदेश दिया। लेकिन रक्षा मंत्रालय ने इस आदेश को सुप्रीम कोर्ट में चुनौती दे दी। बहरहाल जब मामला देश की सबसे बड़ी अदालत में पहुंचा, तो उसने महिला अफ़सरों की मांग को जायज माना और हाई कोर्ट के फैसले पर रोक नहीं लगाई। हाई कोर्ट के फैसले के नौ साल बाद सरकार ने फरवरी, 2019 में दस विभागों में महिला अधिकारियों को स्थायी कमीशन देने की नीति बनाई। पर साथ ही यह शर्त भी लगा दी कि इसका लाभ मार्च, 2019 के बाद से सेवा में आने वाली महिला अधिकारियों को ही मिलेगा। इस तरह वह महिलाएं स्थाई कमीशन पाने से वंचित रह गईं, जिन्होंने इस मसले पर लंबे अरसे तक कानूनी लड़ाई लड़ी।

महिलाओं को लेकर सेना में हमेशा से एक हिचक रही है। साल 1991 तक भारतीय सेनाओं में महिला अधिकारियों की भर्ती नहीं होती थी। उन्हें सेना के काबिल नहीं समझा जाता था, लेकिन आहिस्ता-आहिस्ता यह धारणा भी टूटी। साल 1992 में उन्हें पहली बार शॉर्ट सर्विस कमीशन में रखे जाने का सिलसिला शुरू किया गया। सेना के भीतर तमाम मौकों पर महिला अधिकारियों के बेहतर प्रदर्शन के बावजूद, सेना ने कभी अपनी महिला अधिकारियों को तवज्जो नहीं दी। उनके बेहतर प्रदर्शन को हमेशा दरकिनार ही किया। काबलियत के बावजूद उन्हें प्रमोशन में वरीयता नहीं दी जा रही है। आज अगर सेना, महिला अधिकारियों को स्थायी कमीशन देने को तैयार हुई है, तो वह भी अदालत के दखल के बाद ही मुमकिन हो पाया है। वरना इसके लिए उन्हें अभी और इंतज़ार करना होता। सेना में महिलाओं के साथ भेदभाव होता आया है, यह इस बात से भी जाना जा सकता है कि नेशनल डिफेंस एकेडमी या एनडीए में उन्हें 12वीं के बाद जाने का मौक़ा नहीं मिलता था। ये चलन छह दशक से ज़्यादा समय से चला आ रहा था। यहां केवल पुरुषों को ही प्रवेश दिया जाता था। इस साल सुप्रीम कोर्ट के हस्तक्षेप के बाद, लड़कियां भी अब लड़कों की तरह एनडीए प्रवेश परीक्षा में बैठ पाएंगी। 12वीं के बाद आर्मड फ़ोर्स में जाने का उनका सपना पूरा होगा। तीनों सेनाओं में लैंगिक समानता लाने के लिए ये एक वाक़ई सकारात्मक कदम है। जब महिलाएं सेना के कॉम्बेट अभियान में हिस्सा ले रही हैं, तो एनडीए की कड़ी चयन प्रक्रिया से गुज़रना उनके लिए कोई मुश्किल काम नहीं। पुरुषों की तरह महिलाएं भी सेना के हर क्षेत्र में काम कर सकती हैं, बस ज़रूरत उन्हें और अधिक मौक़ा देने की है।

Jahid Khan is a Madhya Pradesh based freelance writer, who has been writing for the past 22 years, with over 1000 articles published in various national journals and magazines. He has also published six books and has won the 'Laadli Media Award for Gender Sensitivity' in 2012, 2013, 2017, 2020, 2021, and 2022 as well as the 'Turning India Award' for journalism in 2014 and the 'Vagishwari Award' in literature in 2016.



8. पश्चिम बंगाल के चाय बागानों में अपने बच्चों को खोती माएं

Sadhika Tiwari | www.indiaspend.com | 16th April, 2021



जलपाईगुड़ी, दार्जीलिंग (पश्चिम बंगाल): रंजीता डे, 45, पश्चिम बंगाल में दार्जीलिंग के फांसीदेवा ब्लॉक के एक चाय बागान में काम करती हैं। रंजीता की शादी करीब दो दशक पहले हुई थी और तब से ही वह यहां काम कर रही हैं। लेकिन इस दौरान वह कई आकस्मिक गर्भपात, एक ऑपरेशन, और पैदा होने के बाद अपने 6 बच्चों की मौत देख चुकी हैं।

रंजीता की कहानी सिर्फ उनकी ही नहीं है। उनके साथ बागान में पत्तियां तोड़ने वाली कई महिलाएं भी ऐसी ही कहानियां बताती हैं। गर्भावस्था के दौरान काम करते करते बच्चा गिरना इनके जीवन का आम हिस्सा हो गया है। "साड़ी उठाकर देखते हैं, खून दिखता है तो पता चलता है कि बच्चा गिर गया, अक्सर दर्द भी नहीं होता। उस दिन घर जल्दी वापस चले जाते हैं, अगले दिन सुबह फिर आते हैं," यहां काम करने वाली एक महिला ने बताया।

इसका कारण है चाय बागानों की विषम परिस्थितियां जिनसे जूझते हुए ये महिलाएं यहां काम करते हुए अपना जीवनयापन करती हैं।

भारत दुनिया का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा चाय उत्पादक देश है, और भारत की सबसे ज़्यादा चाय, असम के बाद पश्चिम बंगाल के बागानों से आती है। चाय भारत का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा रोज़गार देने वाला

उद्योग है, जिसमें ज्यादातर महिलाएँ शामिल हैं। चाय बागानों में काम करने वाले कुल कर्मचारियों में से लगभग 50% महिलाएँ हैं। पश्चिम बंगाल के चाय बागानों में 2.06 लाख से ज़्यादा महिलाएँ काम करती हैं।

ये महिलाएँ और इनके परिवार, जिनमें से ज़्यादातर दार्जीलिंग और जलपाईगुड़ी में रहते हैं, 17 अप्रैल को पश्चिम बंगाल के 8 चरण में हो रहे विधानसभा चुनाव में मतदान करेंगे।



दार्जीलिंग के फांसीदेवा के चाय बागान में अपने बच्चे को पीठ पर बांध कर काम कर रही एक महिला। फोटो: साधिका तिवारी

रंजीता के गाँव में, घर के पास और चाय बागान के रास्ते में तृणमूल कांग्रेस और भारतीय जनता पार्टी के सैकड़ों रंगीन झंडे और पोस्टर दिखाई देते हैं, पर रंजीता जैसे वोटर और उनकी समस्याएँ चुनाव-दर-चुनाव नजरअंदाज की जाती हैं।

‘कई आकस्मिक गर्भपात, एक ऑपरेशन और 6 बच्चों की मौत’

“शनिवार का दिन था, शनिवार को मेरी छुट्टी 4 बजे ही हो जाती थी। उस दिन बारिश हो रही थी। गाँव से थोड़ी दूर मेला लगा था तो मैंने सोचा मैं जल्दी-जल्दी पाती तोड़ कर चली जाऊँगी। उस दिन मैं साइकिल भी नहीं लायी थी, तो पैदल चल कर ही जाना था,” रंजीता लगभग 20 साल पहले की घटना बताती है, जब वो 5 या 6 महीने के गर्भ से थीं।

“मैंने जल्दी-जल्दी काम निपटाया, इसके बाद करीब 20-25 किलो पतियाँ मैंने उठायी और उनको जमा करने गयी। चाय बागान में पानी के बहाव के लिए नालियाँ होती हैं जिन्हें कूद कूद कर जाना होता है, मेरे पेट में बच्चा था और सर पर पतियाँ। उस दिन मैंने रोज़ की तरह नाली कूदी और फिसल कर नाली में गिर गयी, मैंने ज़्यादा ध्यान नहीं दिया, पतियाँ जमा करके घर चली गयी,” रंजीता ने बताया।

“उस दिन मेरा बच्चा पेट में मर गया और मुझे पता भी नहीं चला, उस समय ज़्यादा कुछ पता भी नहीं था, इस बात से कोई फ़र्क़ नहीं पड़ा। कुछ 10-12 दिन बाद मुझे गंध आने लगी, कुछ कमजोरी

भी महसूस हुई। तब चाय बागान की और औरतों ने बताया कि शायद नाली कूदने से मेरा बच्चा मर गया, सड़ गया और मुझे पता भी नहीं चला," रंजीता बताती हैं।



चाय बागान में काम कर रही महिलाएँ, जो 8 से 12 घंटे काम करती हैं

"एक दीदी ने कहा डॉक्टर के पास जाना ज़रूरी है, पर मैंने कहा कि अभी तो काम है, काम खत्म करके पति को पूछूँगी। मैंने पती को बोला की जाना पड़ेगा, खुड़बाड़ी (पास का एक गाँव) अस्पताल भी यहाँ से बहुत दूर है, तो साइकल से वो मुझे डॉक्टर के पास ले कर गया। वहाँ डॉक्टर ने कहा कि गर्भपात हो गया है और अब अस्पताल में भर्ती होना पड़ेगा, इसके उसने 35,000 रुपए माँगे। पति वापस आया और पूरी बस्ती वालों से पैसे उधार लिया, पता नहीं कितने पैसे जमा हुए, कितने दिए गए," रंजीता ने बताया।

रंजीता ने गर्भावस्था के दौरान कभी भी जाँचें नहीं करवाईं। सरकार के अनुसार गर्भावस्था के दौरान चार जाँचें ज़रूरी होती हैं, ये जाँच हर सरकारी अस्पताल, स्वास्थ्य केंद्र या आंगनबाड़ी केंद्र में मुफ्त की जाती। इनके किसी भी बच्चे का कोई भी टीकाकरण नहीं हुआ, बीते 5-6 सालों में पैदा हुए बच्चों को सिर्फ़ पोलियो की दावा दी गयी। रंजीता के सारे बच्चे घर पर ही पैदा हुए, प्रसव के समय उनके साथ कोई दाई भी नहीं थी।

"दर्द होते ही बच्चा आ जाता था बस, अस्पताल जाना ही मुश्किल था," रंजीता ने बताया।

इन सालों में चाय बागान के कर्मचारियों ने कई बार बेहतर दिहाड़ी की मांग की जिसके बाद आज रंजीता 15 दिन के रुपए 2,130 कमाती हैं। बागान की अन्य सभी महिलाओं की तरह वो सुबह 3 बजे उठती हैं, दिन में 12 घंटे चाय बागान में काम करती है जिसके उन्हें रोज़ाना रुपए 142 मिलते हैं। इसके सिवा ये घर का सारा काम, खाना बनाना, बच्चों की देखरेख भी करती है।

इन सालों में रंजीता ने अपने 6 बच्चे खोए हैं। उन्हें उनकी मृत्यु का कारण नहीं पता, उनके अनुसार कुछ बच्चे पैदा होने के कुछ घंटों में ही मर गए और कुछ थोड़े दिन या महीने के बाद।

हर बच्चे की मौत रंजीता को उतनी ही स्पष्टता से याद है। सालों बाद भी उनकी बात करते हुए रंजीता की आँखों में आंसू आ जाते हैं।

"याद करने से क्या होगा, कोई बच्चा वापस थोड़ी आएगा। मेरी आखिरी बच्ची जो मरी, उसका नाम दशमी था, वो दुर्गा पूजा में पैदा हुई थी। उसके इलाज में डेढ़ दो लाख रुपए खर्च हुआ, पूरी बस्ती से उधार लिया, उसका उधार रुपए 500 दे देकर अभी तक चुका रहे हैं," रंजीता ने बताया।

अभी रंजीता की दो बेटियाँ हैं, एक 14 और एक 12 साल की। इतना सब कुछ होने के बावजूद भी रंजीता इन चाय बागानों में काम करने को मजबूर हैं। "हम लोग तो बागान के आदमी हैं, चाय बागान हमारा सब कुछ खा गया, फिर भी मजबूरी में यहाँ काम करते हैं।"

चाय बागान में काम करने वाली महिलाओं की समस्याएं

"चाय बागान में काम करने में बहुत तकलीफ़ है, पैसा भी कम है, धूप, बरसात, ठंड, हम हर समय काम करते हैं। कोई छुट्टी नहीं होती, बागान में शौचालय भी नहीं होता है," 45 वर्ष की मिलाईका ने बताया जो 15 साल की उम्र से ही इन बागानों में काम कर रही हैं।



चाय बागान में छतरी और दस्ताने पहनकर काम कर रही महिलाएं। ये सुविधाएँ सिर्फ़ कुछ कर्मचारियों को ही नियमित रूप से मिल पाती हैं

"गर्भवती महिला को काम करने में बहुत असुविधा होती है, भारी भारी 25-30-50 किलो पत्तियाँ सिर पर उठानी पड़ती है। सिर पर पत्तियाँ रख कर, नाली कूद कर चाय बागान से ऑफिस तक इन्हें जमा करने जाना पड़ता है," मिलाईका ने बताया।

गर्भावस्था के दौरान कोई छुट्टी नहीं मिलती, जितने दिन काम नहीं होता उतने दिन के पैसे नहीं मिलते, मजबूरी में महिलाएं काम करती रहती हैं।

"खाने के लिए पैसा चाहिए, तो आखिरी महीनो में पूरे दिन काम कर के जब रात को सोते हैं तो अक्सर समय से पहले ही दर्द होता है और घर में ही बच्चा हो जाता है," दो बेटों की माँ और चाय बागान में 20 साल से काम रही, 35 वर्ष की अरुणा किसपोट्टा ने बताया।

बच्चा पैदा होने के बाद भी ये दिक्कतें जारी रहती हैं, बागानों में कोई शिशु गृह नहीं होता, "बच्चे को दूध पिलाने का भी समय नहीं होता, हम बागान में छुप छुप कर दूध पिलाते हैं," अरुणा ने बताया। बागान में काम के बीच कोई ब्रेक भी नहीं मिलता, "जब गर्भ से होती है, या गर्भपात या प्रसव के बाद जब कमजोरी लगती है तो छुप के सोना पड़ता है, बाक़ी दीदी लोग ध्यान रखती हैं," अरुणा ने बताया।

"पीठ में बच्चा बांध कर, सिर भी पट्टी रख कर पूरे दिन काम करना पड़ता है, इतना चलना पड़ता है, रास्ता भी ठीक नहीं है, बड़ा बड़ा नाला होता है। ये सब करो तब पैसा मिलेगा," दो बच्चों की माँ, मिलाईका ने बताया।

नियमों के बावजूद कोई सुविधा नहीं

"बाग में काम करने वाले लोगों का हर महीने में ब्लड टेस्ट होना चाहिए, वो कभी नहीं होता, सबको मास्क देना चाहिए, दस्ताने देने चाहिए, जो किसी-किसी को ही मिलते हैं। चप्पल साल में दो बार मिलती है, छतरी दो-तीन साल में एक बार, इतने में कैसे चलेगा। पूरी मेडिकल व्यवस्था होनी चाहिए पर ऐसा कुछ नहीं होता है। कभी कभी सबको एंटीबायोटिक की गोली दे देते हैं," रोमा रश्मि एक्का, 30, ने बताया जो चाय बागान के खाडुभंगा गाँव में रहती है, और चाय बागान में काम कर रही आदिवासी महिलाओं के साथ काम करने वाली एक सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता हैं।

"फ़र्स्ट एड भी आधा अधूरा होता है, कितने लोगों को बाग में सांप काटता है, पर इसके ज़हर के लिए फ़र्स्ट एड में कुछ नहीं होता, ऐम्ब्युलन्स टाइम पर आ नहीं पाती और कितने लोग इसकी वजह से ही मार जाते हैं," रोमा ने बताया।

चाय बग़ानों में मूलभूत सुविधाओं की कमी

चाय बाग़ानों में काम करने वाले लोग आस-पास के गाँवों में रहते हैं। इन गाँवों में ज़्यादातर घर कच्चे हैं, घर के शौचालयों में पानी की व्यवस्था ठीक नहीं है, पीने का पानी अक्सर पास के हैंडपंप से आता है, गांव से बाहर जाने के लिए उचित जन परिवहन उपलब्ध नहीं है क्योंकि बागान शहर से कटे हुए हैं, लोग ज़्यादातर साइकिल का इस्तेमाल करते हैं, खाना बनाने के लिए लोग चूल्हों का इस्तेमाल करते हैं क्योंकि यहाँ तक गैस सिलेंडर लाना और भी महँगा है, बरसात में बाग से ख़तरनाक सांप निकलते हैं और रात को कभी कभी तेंदुआ आ जाता है।

यहाँ काम करने वाले लोग अभी भी मूलभूत सुविधाओं के लिए परेशान हैं जबकि भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था को इनकी मेहनत से काफ़ी लाभ होता है। दुनिया के दूसरे सबसे बड़ा चाय उत्पादक, भारत ने साल 2019 में 1,340 kg चाय का उत्पादन किया और 831 मिलियन अमरीकी डॉलर का निर्यात किया। कुल उत्पादन का 81% असम और पश्चिम बंगाल से आता है।



दार्जिलिंग के चाय बागान जो दुनिया भर में अपनी पत्तियों की गुणवत्ता के लिए मशहूर है

पश्चिम बंगाल में 276 पंजीकृत चाय बागान हैं, उनमें से ज्यादातर जलपाईगुड़ी और दार्जिलिंग में हैं, सिर्फ एक बागान कूच बिहार ज़िले में है। बंगाल में साल 2019 में 39.4 करोड़ kg चाय का उत्पादन किया।

दार्जिलिंग के चाय बागान 1859 में और जलपाईगुड़ी के 1879 में शुरू गए थे और यहां काम करने वाले लोग ज्यादातर आदिवासी या अनुसूचित जनजातियों से थे या नेपाली समुदाय की अनुसूचित जातियों से थे। ऐतिहासिक तौर पर इन कर्मचारियों में ज्यादातर महिलाएं शामिल रही हैं। लेबर ब्यूरो के 2012 के आंकड़ों के अनुसार देशभर के सभी चाय बागानों के कुल कर्मचारियों में 55.9% महिलाएं थीं।

उत्तर बंगाल के चाय बागानों में उपलब्ध सुविधाओं और काम की परिस्थितियों का मुआयना करने के लिए स्थानीय श्रमिक कार्यालयों ने संयुक्त श्रम आयुक्त के अंतर्गत, साल 2013 में, बंगाल के 276 चाय बागानों में से 273 का एक सर्वे किया। इस सर्वे के नतीजे हालात को और स्पष्ट करते हैं।

सर्वे किए चाय बागानों में से सिर्फ 166 में अस्पताल हैं, जिसमें से सिर्फ 56 में पूर्णकालिक आवासीय डॉक्टर मौजूद है, अन्य 110 अस्पताल विस्टिंग डॉक्टर पर निर्भर हैं और सिर्फ 74 अस्पतालों में एमबीबीएस डॉक्टर मौजूद है, 116 अस्पतालों में कोई नर्स नहीं है और 107 अस्पतालों में कोई डॉक्टर ही उपलब्ध नहीं है। सिर्फ 160 बागानों में प्राथमिक स्वास्थ्य केंद्र है, जबकि 85 बागानों में डिस्पेंसरी तक नहीं है, सिर्फ 160 बागानों में ऐम्बुलन्स की सुविधा उपलब्ध है, जिनमें से ज्यादातर ऐम्बुलन्स की स्थिति ज़रूरी मानकों के अनुसार खराब है।

चाय बागान की परिस्थिति कर्मचारियों के मानवाधिकारों का उल्लंघन

चाय बागानों के कर्मचारी काफ़ी सारी मूलभूत सुविधाओं के लिए प्लैटेशन स्टेटस पर निर्भर होते हैं, कानूनी तौर पर इन्हें ऐसा करना का अधिकार 1951 के प्लांटेशन मज़दूर कानून के तहत अधिकार दिया गया है और इन कर्मचारियों के मानवाधिकारों का अक्सर उल्लंघन होता है। ग्लोबल नेटवर्क फॉर द राइट टू फूड एंड न्यूट्रिशन की एक साल 2016 की तथ्यान्वेषी मिशन रिपोर्ट के अनुसार

लगभग सभी चाय बागानों में अंतरराष्ट्रीय और भारतीय कानूनों के तहत महिलाओं के अधिकारों का हनन और लिंग आधारित भेद-भाव पाया गया।

सरकार का दायित्व है कि महिलाएं भी काम करने के अधिकार का पूरा लाभ पा सकें पर चाय बागान में ऐसा होता नहीं है, मर्द ज्यादा तनखाह की बेहतर नौकरियां करते हैं और औरतें सिर्फ पत्तियां तोड़ने का काम जहाँ पदोन्नति की संभावना नहीं होती, रिपोर्ट में पाया गया। ज्यादातर बागानों में महिलाओं के मातृत्व सुरक्षा अधिकारों का हनन होता है, खासकर गर्भावस्था के दौरान महिला के स्वास्थ्य की सही देखभाल और सुरक्षा, मातृत्व अवकाश, स्तनपान के लिए ब्रेक, और प्रसव-पूर्व एवं प्रसव के बाद जांच। महिलाओं से गर्भावस्था के दौरान भी वही काम करवाए जाते हैं, अक्सर गर्भ के आठ मास तक, अन्य महिलाओं के इसके बदले ज्यादा कार्यभार माँगने के बावजूद।



बिना किसी मास्क, दस्ताने या छतरी के साथ चाय बागान में काम कर रही महिला, ये सुविधाएं हर कर्मचारी को मिलना अनिवार्य है

गर्भावस्था अवकाश ज्यादातर दिहाड़ी मज़दूरों के लिए होता ही नहीं है। राष्ट्रीय और अंतरराष्ट्रीय, दोनों कानूनों का उल्लंघन करते हुए इन महिलाओं को काम पर वापस जाने के बाद स्तनपान कराने का ब्रेक नहीं दिया जाता, और रिपोर्ट के अनुसार स्तनपान कराती हुई माओं के साथ यौन उत्पीड़न के मामले भी सामने आए हैं।

रिपोर्ट के अनुसार महिलाओं के लिए शिशुगृह होना अनिवार्य है, पर ये ज्यादातर जगहों पर मौजूद नहीं है, जहाँ हैं वहाँ ये ज़रूरत से छोटा और अस्वच्छ है।

गर्भ के दौरान और बाद की जांच चाय बागान की महिलाओं में कम और पहुँच से बाहर पायी गयी। सरकारी अस्पतालों के डॉक्टरों ने बताया कि ज्यादातर गर्भवती महिलाएं एनीमिया का शिकार हैं और प्रसव के दौरान आने वाली समस्याओं से अक्सर इनकी मौत हो जाती है। इन इलाकों में किशोरी गर्भधारण के मामले भी काफ़ी ज्यादा हैं जिसमें जच्चा-बच्चा दोनों को ज्यादा ख़तरा होता है।

गर्भधारण में दिक्कत, प्रसव में कठिनाइयां और स्तनपान में नुकसान का एक कारण बाग में छिड़के जाने वाले कीटनाशक का असर भी पाया गया। बागानों में पीने के पानी की दिक्कत भी महिलाओं पर ज्यादा भारी पड़ती है क्योंकि अक्सर महिलाओं को ही पानी भरने जाना पड़ता है, रिपोर्ट ने बताया। साथ ही उपयुक्त शौचालय ना होने का असर पुरुषों के मुकाबले, महिलाओं पर ज्यादा पड़ता

हैं जिन्हें शर्म और सामाजिक दिक्कतें झेलनी पड़ती हैं और साथ ही इन्फेक्शन का खतरा भी ज्यादा होता है।



दस्ताने पहन कर चाय बागान में पत्तियां तोड़ती महिलाएं

साल 2021-22 के बजट में सरकार ने चाय बागान कर्मचारियों के कल्याण के लिए ₹1,000 करोड़ रुपए आवंटित करने का प्रस्ताव रखा है, और कहा है कि इसके लिए एक खास योजना भी बनाई जाएगी। इस चुनाव में भी ये लोग ना तो किसी पार्टी के चुनावी भाषण का हिस्सा हैं और ना ही किसी नेता की चिंता।

रंजीता का कहना है कि उन्हें इस चुनाव से कोई फ़र्क नहीं पड़ता, "सरकार तो कोई भी आए हमको क्या मिलेगा, मेरा बच्चा कोई थोड़े ही वापस लाएगा।"

Sadhika Tiwari has been a multimedia journalist for over five years. She is currently working as a principal correspondent with 'The Quint'. Her primary beats have been climate change, agriculture, and issues of development. With her often particularly focusing on their impact on women, Sadhika is also a member of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network of the University of Oxford.

<https://indiaspendhindi.com/cover-story/mothers-losing-their-children-to-the-tea-gardens-of-west-bengal-742334>



Invisible and Marginalized

Invisibilisation of women is rampant in society. Their identity and status determined by their gendered role as mothers, caregivers and protectors of traditions and rituals. Women who move into the public domain to pursue careers, particularly in esoteric and non-feminine professions, often face innumerable hurdles, be it in the form of sexism in organizations, casual misogyny, or organizational policies which favour men.

It is in this context that the efforts by 101Reporters, through the Rukhmabai Fellowship for Women in STEM, assume significance. The fellowship aims to inspire and encourage young girls and women to study and work in the various fields of science and technology by highlighting stories of contemporary Indian women in STEM. Creating awareness about the struggles and achievements of women role models in the STEM fields is critical for enhancing the value of women and girls in society and it brings us immense joy to present one of the many stories published by Rukhmabai Fellowships 101 Reporters here.

Asiri Amin, a fellow of the Rukhmabai Initiatives, in her piece titled, **‘Calling out gender bias in STEM’**, creates a compelling narrative profiling the professional journey of renowned biologist Dr Vaishnavi Ananthanarayanan. In her piece, Asiri chronicles the challenges faced by Dr Vaishnavi, being one of the few women in academia, the allies that supported, and what led her to start her initiative - BiasWatchIndia, which documents women’s representation and combats gender-biased panels in Indian Science conferences, meetings, and talks.

Similarly, while the pandemic greatly impacted all, its impact on women and their livelihoods remained unexplored in most media reports. Biswajeet Banerjee treads into this uncharted path through his article **‘Harvest of hope’** and shares the inspiring journey of Phula Devi from the nondescript village of Nibi, in the rugged Banda district in Bundelkhand and how she single-handedly, with an indomitable entrepreneurial spirit, chose to stand tall on her own feet. A migrant labourer during the lockdown, Phulan’s story, like so many others, is one rife with overcoming insurmountable odds and humiliation to make the long arduous journey home. What set her apart though, was her decision and will to not return once the lockdown was lifted and the call made for migrant labour. Phulan Devi instead chose to enter into sharecropping by negotiating with the landlords, thus breaking the societal norms and taboos regarding women being sharecroppers in their own right. A truly inspiring figure asserting her rights.

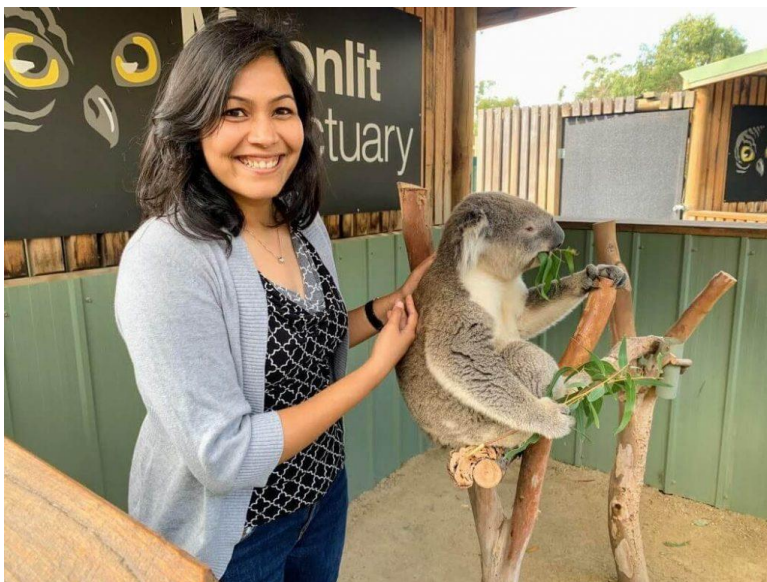
In a patriarchal society, women can oftentimes be expected to silently endure injustice. In some cases though, like in the case of disabled women, they are left anticipating it from those closest to them. Which is Nu examines with her unique perspective article in, **‘Disabled Bodies Navigating Abuse & Violence: #DisabledWomenRiot’**. As she examines the unique set of challenges faced by disabled women navigating how a support system, can quickly turns into an abusive relationship.

Lastly, with ‘कोरोना में मानसिक तौर पर पस्त हो रही औरतें’ Narjis Husain showcases how while the culture narrative has shifted towards the importance of mental health, it was working women who suffered the most, disproportionately, during the pandemic. As they faced the dual challenges of being the primary targets of layoffs and the primary caregivers to their families.

These are the stories that need to be told.

9. Calling out gender bias in STEM

Aisiri Amin | Rukhmabai Initiatives | 15th August, 2021



From very early on, Dr Vaishnavi Ananthanarayanan became aware of the passive yet glaring ways in which women in academia were being held back. She co-founded BiasWatchIndia to bring in some accountability.

Bengaluru: It was a curiosity about the natural world that sparked Dr Vaishnavi Ananthanarayanan's interest in biology and led her to eventually become an EMBL Australia Group Leader at the Single Molecule Science unit at the University of New South Wales, Sydney.

Born in Chennai and brought up in Pondicherry, Vaishnavi's interest in science was nurtured by her parents. *"If you don't have an encouraging home environment, it can be damaging, especially for girls,"* she said. Her mother, Janakavalli Anathanarayanan gushed with pride about Vaishnavi's independence. *"You know, we haven't paid for anything apart from food. She always got scholarships."* She added, *"If you let them choose their path, they do very well."*

From very early in her student life, Vaishnavi was aware of the disadvantages girls faced in the education system. The underrepresentation of women in STEM is rooted in gender bias in schools. This bias can range from teachers discouraging girls from pursuing science to the subtle preferential bias towards cisgender-heterosexual males.

Students were selected based on their class 12th marks, which contributed to more enrolments of women. In her batch, 40% were women but that changed after she graduated. With the college's entrance exam, BITSAT made compulsory, the number of women students reduced to around 10%. For instance, Vaishnavi topped most of her classes but in class 12 she was asked to share the 'Best Student Award' for that year's topper with a boy, even though he had scored less than her.

"They were going to give it to the boy, but someone fought for me. The principal said it was done so that boys don't feel discouraged, which was bizarre." Would they have done it if it was the other way round, she wondered.

After school, Vaishnavi enrolled in an integrated M.Sc. in Biological Sciences, B.E. Computer Science dual degree program at Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) in Pilani, Goa.

"For such entrance exams, you need coaching. But not many girls' parents want to spend on it because they think she will get married so what's the use of studying engineering at these premier institutes?" Vaishnavi said.

Hence, with the dominance of cis-het males, misogyny was rampant in the college. Glorification of the toxic behaviours in popular culture has a ripple effect on campuses across India, Vaishnavi added. Her foray into academia and research was full of great mentors, colleagues and opportunities, which only made her more aware of how debilitating it could be to not have that support system.

Starting her lab and making a place in academia

Vaishnavi did her PhD in Biophysics at the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics, Dresden, Germany under the mentorship of biophysicist, Dr Iva Tolić. In 2014, Vaishnavi received the INSPIRE Faculty Fellowship from the Department of Science and Technology (DST), India, and started her lab at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, India. She went on to become an Assistant Professor at the Centre for BioSystems Science and Engineering at IISc.

She received the EMBO Young Investigator Award and the Wellcome Trust/DBT – India Alliance Intermediate Fellowship in 2019.

Talking briefly about her research she said, *"We are trying to answer how the cytoskeleton and motor proteins bring about a cellular organisation. This is the theme that has been apparent during my PhD, but also at IISc. In Australia, I am expanding on this."*

Dr Siddharth Jhunjhunwala, assistant professor at IISc and a friend, said Vaishnavi is the mentor who always stepped up and showed how things are done. *“She is very patient as a mentor. She would spend time with students, take them through her experimental work and teach them how to analyse data which not many do.”*

Vaishnavi’s colleague at IISc, Dr Sandhya S. Visweswariah called her ‘an exceptional individual with absolute clarity with what she wants to do.’ While Vaishnavi refers to her as a mentor, Prof Visweswariah said with a laugh, *“It was really easy to mentor her because she didn’t need it.”*

Gender bias and the need for allies in STEM

Although in academia Vaishnavi found supportive peers and mentors, she soon realised that it can be an isolating place, especially for women. She constantly felt like her presence had to be justified, was undermined daily, and had to invest mental and physical energy in fighting biases that men didn’t have to face.

Vaishnavi recalls subtle instances such as the accounts section at IISc asking her to get a signature from her ‘Sir’ when she enquired about one of her bills. *“I am the Sir,”* she replied.

In another instance, a senior researcher to whom she had introduced herself, would ignore her whenever he came across her. *“When I was with a male colleague, he would say hello to him but still ignore me. That made me feel like I wasn’t equal,”* she said.

Dr Jhunjhunwala, the colleague in question, said he didn’t notice at first but after Vaishnavi pointed it out, he was embarrassed on the professor’s behalf. *“Having the conversation with her made me understand the gender biases that women in academia regularly face. Male faculty members often don’t even think about or notice these issues as they don’t have to deal with them. But, it’s on us to realise our privilege and do better.”*

Finding mentors, like-minded peers and a community to lean on is imperative to making advancements in academia. However, it’s often an exhaustive path when the space is not designed to help you.

“If anything, it is designed to get you out. To be able to make it through, you need allies. I was fortunate to have Iva and Sandya,” Vaishnavi said.

Echoing her views, Prof. Visweswariah says, *“When you go up the ladder, the numbers dwindle. So, men see only men. When you enter, you never really know what is expected of you to be able to achieve what you’re capable of. So, having someone to guide you can make all the difference.”*

Challenging misogyny through BiasWatchIndia

Apart from research, Vaishnavi is well-known in academia for her initiative BiasWatchIndia which she co-founded with Dr Shruti Muralidhar in June 2020. It all started with Shruthi, a postdoctoral Fellow at MIT, tweeting about BiasWatch-Neuro, an organisation that documents the ratio of women speakers in neuroscience conferences across the world, and asking if it's possible to do something similar in Indian academia.

Vaishnavi was quick to get in touch and used her grant money from the EMBO Young Investigator Award to start the initiative, BiasWatchIndia.

"There is implicit and explicit discrimination against having women speakers. Typically, men would make it an 'old boys club' and invite their friends, which meant more men. I've been in faculty meetings where I was the only woman," she said.

Earlier Vaishnavi had spoken about the need for more women in IISc and has been invested in the cause for a while. *"When I was there, I think only 7% of faculty members were women. So, I was acutely aware of how low the representation was."*

BiasWatchIndia documents women's representation and combats gender-biased panels in Indian Science conferences, meetings, and talks. They start by looking at conferences, and speaker lists and checking the number of women speakers. Then for that number to make sense, they find out the percentage of women in the specific area, compare them and put up their details on their Twitter page and website. This information about the number of women in a particular area is not publicly available. So, Vaishnavi and Shruthi visit the websites of institutes individually and collate information, which can be a difficult process.

Although they did get a lot of support, they also raised some eyebrows. *"But when we hear about people being worried about getting called out by BiasWatchIndia and changing their speaker ratios, that feels good,"* Vaishnavi said.

Prof Visweswariah notes that it takes a lot of courage to call people out and shake up the system. *"It is possible because she is sure of herself as an individual and a scientist. Moreover, people are now paying attention to biases in conferences."* When Vaishnavi entered academia, her father, Ananthanarayanan, who is an engineer, was worried about the gender bias that she would have to face in STEM, which she did. *"Now she is fighting it through BiasWatchIndia and hopefully making it a little easier for others,"* he said proudly.

To make academia a more inclusive space, implementing accountability and transparency is a crucial step forward. Vaishnavi advocates for mandating annual gender audits by funding bodies of Indian institutes to make public the number of women that they employ and enrol so that mere tokenism can't be passed off as gender representation.

“You owe it to the women paying taxes, to be honest about how many women you have in academia,” Vaishnavi said.

An initiative by 101Reporters, the Rukhmabai Fellowship for women in STEM, aims to inspire, provoke and encourage young girls and women to study and work in the various fields of science and technology by highlighting stories of contemporary Indian women in STEM. We believe that awareness about the struggles and achievements of women role models in the STEM fields will boost girls and young women to dream big and steer them to take up the sciences. And we want to tell these stories through the words of women journalists.

<https://www.rukhmabai.com/calling-out-gender-bias-in-stem/>



10. Harvest of Hope

Biswajeet Banerjee | The Pioneer | March 7th, 2021



It was October. Economic activities had started. The hum of the machines in factories was back all across the country. There was a sense of hope. Amid this euphoria, many migrant labourers in the nondescript village of Nibi, in the rugged Banda district in Bundelkhand, decided not to go back to factories in Vapi in Gujarat. They were working in a cloth factory before the lockdown was announced and had returned home during the lockdown. Phula Devi, one of them, decided to stay back in her village. The agony and humiliation that she and her family faced during the lockdown were fresh in her memory.

She communicated her decision to the women of the group who had returned with her to the village. *"My resolve was to stay back and try to earn my living in my own village. I was not ready to face the humiliation yet again of being treated as an outsider. There was a fear that if anything 'bad' happens it will push the family to the brink of starvation yet again,"* she told this reporter in her village compound which was surrounded by other women, men and small children.

She had no idea what she would do. She was a landless farmer. The majority of the villagers who had shifted to Vaapi with her were landless too and were forced to move out of the village to eke out their earnings because of the deprivation they faced in the village.

The Covid pandemic and the subsequent lockdown announced to arrest the spread of Coronavirus pushed them to the same crossroads of deprivation. The factory was closed in March. Devi along with around two dozen village-mates including relatives, who were working as labourers, preferred to stay put with the hope that the situation will improve and they will find work in the city.

The situation deteriorated with every passing day. The owner of the factory refused to help them. He even did not pay Rs 8000 as a salary which was due saying he does not have money. They were then forced to dig deep into their savings. When the Gujarat Government announced relief, they were treated as outsiders and were deprived of Government benefits. Once they exhausted their savings, they were left with no option but to return to their village.

It was the last week of June. With no money in their pockets, they decided to walk down over 1300 km distance on foot from Vaapi to Banda. They were a group of 19 people including five children. For a day and a half, they walked braving the scorching sun. They tried to hitch a ride but the truck drivers asked exorbitant fare of Rs 3,000 per person. They preferred to walk. They survived on the food and water that some NGOs provided them en route.

They reached Nashik where they got a train that brought them to Jhansi and from there they came to Banda.

"It was a second life for us. We fought hunger, frustration and exhaustion to reach our village so that we can live again. And when people started talking about going back after the situation improved, old images started flashing in my mind and I decided not to leave the village again," Devi tells you.

Her friend Kusuma too agreed to stay back. But the big question staring at their face was what will they do in the village as there are not enough employment opportunities there. The construction work in the village and adjoining Attarra block was limited. The work under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was not easily available. The villagers complained that the Pradhan of the *Gram Sabha*, who is from the upper caste, ignored the residents of the Nibi village because a majority of them were from the *Dalit* community.

The social barriers which are well defined by caste proved an impediment to Devi's entrepreneurial dream. The majority of the farmers were landless and belonged to marginalised communities. The village is dominated by the upper caste, followed by backward and intermediary caste people. They have ownership of the majority of the land. The Dalits, like in the Hindu caste hierarchy, are at the bottom of the resources available in the village.

The *gram sabha* record shows that the village has around 400 households that share 1500 hectares of agricultural land between them. The ownership of land is very skewed. The

record says that 15 per cent of the population (which is around 60 households) owns around 60 per cent (around 900 hectares) of land. These are all upper-caste people.

There are 140 households from the Backward Community that own almost 600 hectares of land. The rest of the households are *Dalits* and they are landless.

Interestingly, Jai Kumar Chaturvedi owns around 100 hectares of land in that village which they give to the landless farmers of the village on sharecropping. In rural India, sharecropping is a common practice where a landless villager takes the land for tillage for a year on an agreed term and after harvest, both can share the crop. In UP the process in local parlance is called '*Batohi*'.

Devi decided to go for farming. *"Initially, surviving was not an issue. We got a free ration from the Yogi Government and once got Rs 1,000 too. Then the local NGO Vidya Dham Samiti provided us help as and when required and so we decided to take this risk,"* she tells you.

As they did not have land, she decided to take one on *batohi*. *"It was a risk worth taking. I know the area is water scarce but this is also a fact that during good monsoon we can have bumper crops here,"* she explains.

She met Raman Chaturvedi, son of Jai Kumar Chaturvedi and asked for a piece of land where they can do farming. *"He looked at us with disbelief because previously we were not on talking terms. 'Hamara jhagda ho gaya tha' (we had quarrelled),"* she tells you sheepishly.

Chaturvedi was perplexed when he saw a group of women come one fine morning and ask for land for sharecropping. *"I was a bit surprised because it is generally men who come to us to discuss the terms and conditions of sharecropping. But when I was told these women who are pravasi mazdoor want to stay back in the village, we decided to give a small portion of land to them,"* he tells you.

Raman agreed to give six *bighas* of land on a 50-50 sharing basis, thus meaning that he will share the cost of agriculture input and will take 50 per cent of the grain produced.

The word spread in the village like fire that Devi was planning to farm. Other women like Vimla, Koiri, Murri and Kusuma too joined her. Devi went around the village advising women of the migrant families, who were planning to go back to Vaapi, to stay back. *"We had faith in Phula. We had seen the worst in Vaapi and were ready to give new resolve shown by Phula a try,"* Murri Devi tells you.

Rajani nods her head in affirmation. *"I and my husband had made up our minds to go back and work in a factory. We postponed our visit for a few days to see how things shape up in the village. It is three months since then and have decided to stay back,"* she tells you with a smile.

The initial scepticism turned to self-belief when villagers saw Devi and Kusuma working in the fields. Devi sowed wheat and vegetables while Kusuma opted for vegetables. In between the words spread about the death of Ram Dayal, a villager from Nibi, in Vaapi and how the contractor forced his wife and son to work in the factory to repay a loan Dayal had taken from him.

Slowly the courtyard of Devi's house became the meeting point for the villagers. Women used to come and sit with Phula discussing the nitty-gritty of farming. This all started with a whisper but soon the women became vocal and the resolve to stay back started gathering momentum.

"I am illiterate. I don't know anything about farming. Initially, I was a labourer and then when I was shifted to Vaapi my work was to sift soiled cloth pieces from fresh ones. So, my knowledge about farming was almost zero," she says.

Her relative Raju came to her rescue. He provided all the basic information like which seed and fertilizer to use and when. Fortunately, the rains were normal and it came as a big relief.

The heads started turning when Kusuma had a good harvest of vegetables like cabbage, potato, cauliflower and other seasonal vegetables. She opened a small makeshift shop inside her house and sold vegetables. *"I earn anything between Rs 125 and Rs 150 per day. Some days, I even earned close to Rs 250,"* Kusuma tells you with a smile.

Kusuma, with her husband, Shiv Avtaar, have even repaired a defunct well near the field which they had taken for batohi. *"Irrigation is not a big issue now for us as we get water from the well which has been neglected for many decades,"* Avtaar says.

More and more women are now ready to take farming. *"Phula motivated us. Kusuma showed us the way and now we have dropped the idea of going back to the factory,"* Koili says. Many in the group nodded in unison as a mark of confirmation of what Koili said.

The women of this non-descript village have become entrepreneurial. When they realized individually, they do not have enough money, they joined hands to do farming. Four friends — Phula, Bimla, Koili and Murri — have entered into their own contract farming where they will share the agricultural input as well as the profit.

All of them have chipped in with Rs 3,000 each and the money collected is used for irrigation, seeds and fertilizers. They have grown varieties of vegetables, onions and wheat. *"We will give half of the crop to the land owner and share the rest among ourselves. This will be enough for us,"* Bimla tells you.

The words have spread around that women in Nibi village have brought a revolution. Around 20 families, all *pravasi mazdoor*, have not gone back despite a call from Thekedar (contractor). Even people in a village Bhujyari purwan, around 20 km from Nibi, narrate how some have brought a social change in the village. *"We have heard that some women*

in nearby villages have opted for farming rather than going back to work in factories. People are talking about the revolution brewing in the villages of Attara,” Vinod Singh, a resident of Bhujyari Purwan said.

Singh, in his early 20s, is also a landowner and gives their land on sharecropping. *“Now in villages too women are coming forward and taking decisions themselves,”* he says in a sarcastic tone.

“Generally, at this time of the year padlocks could be seen at doors and a deadly silence drapes the Nibi village. This year it is different. The sounds of laughter, cries and chatter emanates from all the houses because the villagers have stayed back. Thanks to the women, life is back in the villages,” Raja Bhaiya of Vidya Dham Samiti, an NGO that works in the region, says.

Lending a hand

The decision women took to stay back in the village after the unlock was not easy. They needed support from the Government and the local society at every step. The local NGO Vidya Dham Samiti came to their rescue.

“We were there just as a support group. The Vidya Dham Samiti (VDS) extended all possible help including technical know-how and sometimes we helped these women with money. But the credit goes to these women who showed a resolve to fight back adversities and turned the crisis into an opportunity,” Raja Bhaiya of VDS tells you.

The Samiti works with the marginalised section of the society in Banda and adjoining regions.

Raja Bhaiya tells you that he has seen the plight of migrant workers during the lockdown. They came back to villages on empty stomachs and practically had nothing with them. *“Condition of Phula and her relatives was no different. Our Samiti helped them initially and later supported them when they decided to stay back despite getting calls from the factory,”* he says.

Regular meetings are held between Samiti members and villagers. *“I saw the seeds of women empowerment sowing in the adverse condition of the Covid pandemic. These women were coming out of the shadow of their husbands. We allowed these women to spread their wings and now the result is for everyone to see,”* Raja Bhaiya tells you.

Fighting water woes

The decision to opt for farming was not easy for the women. The primary reason being the region is water scarce. So, when Kusuma opted to grow vegetables the first thought that came to her mind was where to get water for irrigation.

This time her caste came to her rescue. Being a *Dalit*, her house was at the corner of the village. There was a well at one corner of the field which was lying defunct for many years. The well was built by upper caste people of the village but they stopped using it after they installed pumps in their houses.

“This well was in very bad shape. One day sitting at the base of the well my husband and I discussed if we can install a pump then withdrawing water from the well would be easy. This way we will be able to solve the irrigation problem too,” Kusuma tells you.

Initially, the husband-wife duo used a bucket to pull water and then irrigated the vegetable with a mug. This was a tedious and time-consuming job.

Shiv Avtaar, husband of Kusuma, had a little bit of knowledge of machines as he had helped electricians in the factory in Vapi. They took a little loan from a private moneylender and installed a pump.

“The water problem is solved to a large extent. After success in the vegetable business, I am looking for diversification. My husband is looking for avenues in fisheries and poultry,” she tells you.

Biswajeet Banerjee is the Political Editor at The Pioneer covering Uttar Pradesh. In recent years he has written articles on slavery, bonded labour, climate change, corruption, and the political system. Biswajeet is a fellow of the National Press Foundation, Washington DC and an alumnus of East West Centre, Honolulu.

<https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/sunday-edition/harvest-of-hope.html>



11. Disabled Bodies Navigating Abuse & Violence: #DisabledWomenRiot

Nu | www.feminisminindia.com | 29th September 2021



Featured image source: [Alia Sinha](#)

Women with disabilities face non-traditional and not easily recognisable forms of abuse where the perpetrator is most often someone we are dependent on for help.

Given how most often we have to depend on others to push our wheelchairs and take us to different places, we become susceptible to being controlled and abused by these very people who take on the roles of care in our lives. We often cannot speak about our abuse because we carry with us the shame of dependence. Instead, we often find ourselves having to continue relying on our abuser, especially in unknown spaces, because there is no escape for us.

Disabled women often find themselves trapped in a space at the mercy of a person who controls our movement, our ability to go to certain places, our ability to dress - everything. An underlying fear scores the disabled body's experience then, simply because dependency can be mistaken as advances seeking love, or the person in control of your whole life can turn on us.

The worst part is that, very often, we physically can do nothing about it, because our body cannot move at our own command.

Dialogues on disabled #MeToo in the feminist movement have been scarce and #DisabledWomenRiot is a campaign that seeks to change that. Through deliberating a discourse on the lived experiences and community of disabled women, non-binary and trans folks, we seek to speak out, speak in, speak up and communicate in whichever way we're comfortable about our abuse: the specific nuances, logistics and social location of abuse that is often ignored and goes unacknowledged in the larger feminist universe.

Herein, I'm going to talk about my abuse, particularly locating myself as a cis-gender, physical disabled, queer woman who has dated cis-het men their entire lives (yes, still doesn't invalidate my bisexuality – I don't have to 'do' something with a woman to be considered bisexual and prove my identity to a heteronormative world), I have gone through varied form of abuses: physical, sexual, emotional and mental. I would also like to clarify how this has been experience: I speak only for myself.

The thing about dating cis-het men is that my agency is questioned from time to time. How do we go beyond surface level evidence of abuse into the deep nuances, the rooted ableism of viewing disabled women not as humans, but as objects of novelty? Objects that only exist to show the world how good these men are for making space for these 'poor', 'crippled' women in their lives. These are women whom nobody wants or desires. These are women who only deserve the bare minimum and probably not even that. These are women who'll be there no matter what, because it is not like they can get up and go somewhere. Disabled women are often viewed in the light of purity and innocence: they don't have a choice, they can't cheat, they're dependent. What happens when we want to say no, but we can't? What happens if we're deaf or have a speech disability that makes us too overwhelmed during intimate situations and struggle with boundaries? Is the solution just to stop engaging in sexual intimacy? Why should we? Why should the onus be on us?



Image Source: Upasana Aggarwal on [Medium](#)

Abusive cis-het men can mould disabled women into any shape they desire. The man I dated gradually came to control and police all areas of my life: what I wore, what I ate, who I interacted with, who I spoke to on social media, who my friends were, what I told

my parents, etc. Women with disabilities face forms of abuse that are rooted in our basic needs. Sometimes, our abuser is a partner who becomes our self-proclaimed caregiver. We are then dependent on them for our basic needs: be it taking medication on time, going to the bathroom, movement in public spaces, to movement in private spaces.

My abuser soon began to control everything and my internalised ableism kept convincing me that this man is nice, kind hearted, takes care of me and is doing me a huge favour because no one else views me as desirable. So, I felt obliged to be thankful that he finds me desirable despite my disability and that he wants to engage in sexual intimacy with me, even though I'm 'ugly and disabled'. Disabled women are taught from a very young age to be grateful for the help that they receive in their life, because their existence is considered fundamentally undesirable. They are a burden on their parents who can't marry them off or give them an education. With this mindset, we grow up to be underconfident and are taught that we must depend on others for our happiness. We would be made to believe that we'll never be enough for ourselves.

I've noticed that my abuse has been intrinsically connected to my physical disability, to logistics and to the social situation that I am in. Many times, I have across a situation where I'm at the mercy of someone else in a public space. This then translates to how I shouldn't show dissent, should not disagree with them and should not be in a conflict situation. I should toe the line of the stereotypical idea of the ideal disabled woman—non-assertive, a 'good' quiet and an obedient girl. I say a disabled *girl* here and not women because we are de-feminised and denied basic aspects of femininity, the concept of disabled womanhood and are lost in a sea of unheard marginalised feminist voices.

The 60-year-old non-disabled man who had kissed me on my cheek said, "*But I was drunk!*" and "*I treat all 19-year-old children the same way!*" He claimed that he treated everyone in the same seemingly fatherly intimate way and that I was just overreacting. His 20-year-old son had agreed too as I wiped away my tears because no one believed me. I would repeatedly wash my hair with fistfuls of shampoo to wash away his kiss on my forehead: a kiss I never wanted.

I felt the same way when a stranger took my inability to button up my shirt due to my disability, as a suggestion for him to unbutton it and give him access to my bare disabled body.

The first time I fell in love was with an emotionally abusive, neglectful person. "*But at least he doesn't sexually abuse me. At least he's kind to me. At least he gives me agency.*" Atleast, atleast, atleast...

The reason I didn't say no when my first boyfriend forcefully slapped me in bed under the guise of being 'kinky' or that he 'accidentally' gave me a black eye, or that he emotionally manipulated me into sexual relations, was because I kept on thinking - "*I hope this gets over soon, I don't want to displease him. Right now, I'm safe, but what if I anger him?*".

Nu (They/Them) is a queer, disabled non-binary person and the founder of UN-recognized Revival Disability India - Magazine and Community. Their work involves working with technology and creating safer digital spaces for queer and disabled folks online. A disability justice author and curator, they collaborated on several spaces that have reclaimed disabled joy, rage, rest and movement. A CREA fellow '22, and a TISS master's student in gender studies, they work on campaigns surrounding disabled abuse and violation of consent.

<https://feminisminindia.com/2021/09/29/disabled-bodies-navigating-abuse-violence-disabledwomenriot/>



12. कोरोना में मानसिक तौर पर पस्त हो रही औरतें

Narjis Husain | www.sehatraag.com | 19th May 2021

कोरोना महामारी ने न सिर्फ शारीरिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़े मुद्दों पर बातचीत की पहल की है बल्कि मानसिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़े मसलों को भी एक नया मंच दिया है। मौजूदा दौर को एक लिहाज से हेल्थ इमर्जेंसी ही नहीं मानसिक स्वास्थ्य महामारी का दौर भी कहा जा सकता है। यह वो महामारी है जिसे फिलहाल हम देख नहीं पा रहे हैं, जो अदृश्य है, ढकी छुपी है। महामारी के शुरूआती दौर से ही करीब-करीब हर उम्र के लोगों में इसका एक अजीब सा डर बना हुआ था। वो एंजाइटी बच्चों, जवानों और बुजुर्गों सभी में थी और यह डर अब कोरोना की दूसरी लहर में और ज्यादा तेजी से फैल गया है। एंजाइटी (हल्की से लेकर गंभीर) डिप्रेशन, स्ट्रेस, मूड में उतार-चढ़ाव, स्बटेंस यूज डिसऑर्डर और इंसोमनिया जैसी मानसिक परेशानियों से आज हर इंसान जूझ रहा है, लेकिन इसका सबसे ज्यादा असर पड़ा है औरतों पर और उनमें भी जो वर्क फ्राम होम और वर्क फॉर होम दोनों ही कर रही हैं।

दिल्ली में रह रही 45 साल की साची अभी तक अपनी नौकरी में काफी खुश थी फिर कोरोना आया कुछ महीने साची ने सबकुछ झेला और फिर आखिर वो दिन भी आया जब कंपनी ने घाटे की आड़ में छंटनी शुरू की। करीब एक महीना डिप्रेशन और इंसोमनिया के बाद साची ने 40 फीसद कम तनखाह पर भी काम करना मंजूर किया। बात नहीं बनी और आखिरकार साची को नौकरी से इस्तीफा देना पड़ा। इस बीच एंजाइटी, स्ट्रेस और डिप्रेशन के कई दौर आए जो खुद को आइसोलेट करके तब गए जब एक दूसरी फर्म में साची को कम पैसे की एक और नौकरी मिली। हालांकि, साची अब नौकरी में तो है लेकिन अपने कामकाजी भविष्य को लेकर नाउम्मीद है। ह्यूमन सॉलिडेरिटी फाउंडेशन की कोरोनाकाल में मानसिक स्वास्थ्य सेवाएं मुहैया कराने वाली मुफ्त टेलिसर्विस को-होप की मनोवैज्ञानिक और स्वतंत्र शोधकर्ता पूजा प्रियंवदा का कहना है, लॉकडाउन से औरतों की मानसिक सेहत पर बुरा असर पड़ा ही है, बच्चे 24x7 घर पर हैं उनकी देखभाल, घर में सहयोग काफी कम मिलता है और ऐसे में नौकरी या काम जाने से जो आर्थिक अस्थिरता उनके जीवन में आयी है उससे बहुत महिलाओं को एंजाइटी या डिप्रेशन जैसी परेशानियां होने लगी है।

इसी तरह की नाउम्मीदी एक ही ऑफिस में अलग-अलग पदों पर काम कर रही चार मिड करियर नौकरीपेशा औरतों को भी है। इनमें से एक निशि का कहना है, ऑफिस में हालात तो पूरे इस्तीफे के बन रहे हैं जबकि हम वर्क फ्राम होम भी कर रहे हैं जो शुरू में तो जरूर अच्छा लगा लेकिन अब काम को घर से संभालना और घर भी संभालना बहुत मुश्किल होता जा रहा है। मैं हर वक्त तनाव और स्ट्रेस में रहती हूं। इसी दफ्तर की वसुधा ने माना कि सुबह से शाम और रात तक घर से काम करने के बाद भी बॉस खुश नहीं रहता। फिर कामवाली के न आने से घर के काम का अलग बोझ बढ़ गया है। पिछले एक साल से हालत ये है कि न बच्चे को देख पा रही हूं, न घर को और न ही खुद को और बॉस भी खुश नहीं। पिछले एक साल से कई-कई दिनों तक मैंने डिप्रेशन फेस किया है और अब मैं बहुत नाउम्मीद हो गई हूं।

जेंडर वाइलेंस पर काम कर रही चेन्नई की संस्था प्रजन्या की फाउंडर स्वर्णा राजगोपालन का कहना है, लॉकडाउन में आई औरतों में आर्थिक असुरक्षा कई मानसिक बीमारियों को जन्म दे रही है जिसमें तनाव आम है और उसके बाद मानसिक बीमारियों का सिलसिला शुरू हो जाता है। क्योंकि जो नौकरियां औरते खो रही हैं उन्हें दोबारा पाना बहुत मुश्किल है। कामवाली सुशीला ने भी अपना दर्द कुछ इस तरह बयां किया, लॉकडाउन से पहले तो सब ठीक चल रहा था लेकिन लॉकडाउन में हमारे भूखों मरने की नौबत आ गई होती अगर हमारे कुछ घरों ने हमें पैसों और राशन से मदद न की होती तो। लॉकडाउन खुलने के बाद एक तो हमारे कई घर छूट गए कई साहब लोगों ने घर बदल लिए फिर जो पुराने घर थे उन्होंने पहले से भी कम पैसों में हमें काम पर वापस रखा। आप बताओं हम कमरे का किराया, बच्चों की फीस और राशन का खर्चा कहां से लाएं। कई रातें तो जागते-जागते ही कट जाती है और कई बार इसी तंगी से घर में क्लेश भी होता है।

दिल्ली सरकार ने पिछले साल लॉकडाउन से पहले और लॉकडाउन के बाद 'Socio-Economic Profile of Residents of Delhi' नाम से एक सर्वे कराया जिसके तहत दिल्ली में फरवरी 2020 में कुल वर्कफोर्स में 26 प्रतिशत औरते बेरोजगार हुईं हालांकि लॉकडाउन खुलने के बाद फरवरी 2021 में यह आंकड़ा बढ़कर 40 फीसद तक पहुंच गया था। कोविड-19 के दौर में दिल्ली में कुल बेरोजगारी करीब 17.4 प्रतिशत तक बढ़ी। जनवरी-फरवरी, 2020 में यह दर 11.1 फीसद थी जो अक्टूबर-नवंबर 2020 आते-आते 28.5 फीसद हो गई। फिफ्र की बात ये है कि जहां पुरुषों में सर्वे के दौरान बेराजगारी 8.7 से 23.3 प्रतिशत तक बढ़ी वहीं औरतों में यह दर 25.6 से 54.7 फीसद तक बढ़ी। यानी दिल्ली के इस सैंपल सर्वे में करीब 83 फीसद औरते कोविड-19 के बाद या तो बेरोजगार हो गई या उन्हें दोबारा काम नहीं मिल पाया। इस सर्वे में सिकिल्ड, सेमी सिकिल्ड और अन-सिकिल्ड सभी तबकों की औरतें शामिल हैं।

इसी तरह की एक और स्टडी दिल्ली में Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) ने अप्रैल में-मई, 2020 में लॉकडाउन के वक्त कामकाजी महिलाओं पर की। इसमें संगठित और असंगठित दोनों ही सेक्टर की औरतों को शामिल किया गया था। जिस सैंपल साइज पर स्टडी हुई उसमें पाया कि 64 प्रतिशत औरतों को नौकरी से हटा दिया गया जबकि 18 फीसद औरतों का तनखाह कम कर दी गई और कुछेक को ही पोस्ट लॉकडाउन में नौकरी मिल पाई। तनवी जो एक बड़े गैर-सरकारी संगठन में फंडरेसिंग का काम करती हैं बताती हैं, लॉकडाउन के शुरूआती दिनों से ही काम का बोझ इतना बढ़ा दिया गया कि घर के एक कमरे को ही मैंने दफ्तर बना लिया। लेकिन, इस बीच 8 साल की बच्ची की ऑनलाइन क्लास, बूढ़े माता-पिता को वक्त पर खाना देना और कामवाली के न होने से मैं बहुत तनाव में रही और अब तक हूं। लॉकडाउन खुलने तक तनवी की तनखाह 30 फीसद तक कट चुकी थी जिससे वह बेहद नाखुश थी क्योंकि तब तक ऑफिस ने छंटनी की लिस्ट भी बना ली थी। इस बारे में पूजा प्रियंवदा ने बताया, औरतों पर हर तरह से भार दोगुना है, मर्द अगर पैसे या रोजगार की जद्दोजहद में है तो भी घर में उन्हें सेवा मिल रही है, लेकिन अधिकतर औरतें दोनों लड़ाइयां लड़ रही हैं, इसके अलावा अनचाहे गर्भ, घरेलू हिंसा में वृद्धि, बच्चों, बूढ़ों या बीमारों की सेवा और देखभाल का ज्यादा बोझ भी औरतों पर ही पड़ा है। कई औरतें कोरोना ग्रस्त होने पर भी गृहस्थी संभालती हैं।

हालांकि सिर्फ दिल्ली ही नहीं यह तस्वीर करीब-करीब हर शहर की कामकाजी औरत की थी। मार्च 2020 के बाद भारत में नौकरियों का संकट बढ़ से बढ़तर होता चला गया संगठित सेक्टर में काम कर रही महिलाओं में मानसिक तनाव की कई अलग वजहें थी जबकि असंगठित क्षेत्र की कामकाजी औरतों को अलग तरह के मानसिक दबावों में जीना पड़ रहा है। मसलन, संगठित सेक्टर की औरतों के लिए घर का खर्चा, मकान या कार के लोन की किस्त, लाइफस्टाइल में समझौता करना, बच्चों पर होने वाला अतिरिक्त खर्च कम होना तनावग्रस्त था वहीं दूसरी तरफ असंगठित सेक्टर की औरतों को कमरे का किराया, बच्चों की फीस और किताबें-कॉपी, राशन का खर्च और ऑनलाइन क्लासों के लिए स्मार्टफोन न हो पाने से पढ़ाई में आ रही दिक्कतें मायूस कर रही थी। वर्क फ्राम होम वाली औरतें न तो काम ही घर से ठीक तरह से कर पा रही हैं और न ही घर को ठीक से संभाल पा रही हैं।

इंश्योरेंस सेक्टर में काम कर रही अनु ने बताया कि न्यूक्लीयर फैमिली होने की वजह से वह ज्यादा दिनों तक वर्क फ्राम होम नहीं कर पाई और मजबूरी में उन्हें नौकरी छोड़नी पड़ी अब परेशानी ये है कि सारा दिन पति को पत्नी और पत्नी को पति और बच्चे के साथ रहना पड़ रहा है जिसके पहले वे आदी नहीं थे। उसपर घर के काम का और बच्चे की ऑनलाइन क्लास करवाने का बोझ दिमागी तौर पर अनु को लगातार परेशान कर रहा है। पूजा प्रियंवदा का कहना है कि, इस हालात का शर्ट टर्म नुकसान यह है कि इससे औरतों की फिजिकल हेल्थ, आपसी रिश्तों पर फर्क पड़ रहा है लेकिन लॉग टर्म में कई शायदियों में अलगाव, कई परिवारों में हिंसा की शुरुआत या वृद्धि भी देखी जा रही है जिससे पहले से ही खराब मानसिक स्वास्थ्य की स्थिति और बिगड़ती नजर आती है।

दरअसल कोविड से पहले की जिन्दगी में सबके पास अपना एक निजी वक्त होता था क्योंकि औरतें भी घर से बाहर जा रही होती थीं तो उनकी भावनाओं की शेयरिंग भी हो जाती थी, लेकिन लॉकडाउन और सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग के जमाने में अब ये होना मुमकिन नहीं, लिहाजा घरों में बंद औरतों में तनाव, मूड स्विंग, डिप्रेशन और एंजाइटी तेजी से फैला। हालांकि, यह सुनने में बड़े हल्के शब्द लगते हैं लेकिन दरअसल यही हालात आगे चलकर गंभीर मानसिक रोगों की जड़ बनते हैं। पूरे वक्त चार दीवारी में बंद रहकर ऑफिस का, घर का या दोनों जगह का काम करना औरत के लिए न सिर्फ मानसिक बल्कि शारीरिक और भावनात्मक तौर पर भी मुश्किल होता जा रहा है। नौकरी जाने या तनख्वाह कटने से घर में जो आर्थिक तंगी आ रही है उन औरतों का मानसिक संतुलन और ज्यादा बिगड़ सकता है जो छोटे घरों में रह रही हैं या जिनके घरों में बड़ी बालकनी या धूप और हवा के लिए खुली जगह नहीं है या कम है। इसके अलावा जिन औरतों ने अपने परिजनों को महामारी में खो दिया या जिन्हें लॉकडाउन के दौरान किसी भी तरह की स्वास्थ्य या सामाजिक सेवा में रुकावट आई हो उन सभी औरतों को मानसिक स्वास्थ्य से जुड़ी परेशानियों से जूझना पड़ रहा है। बाद इसके अगर घरेलू हिंसा घर में हो तो यह तनाव एक ही झटके में कहीं गुना ज्यादा बढ़ जाता है। यही वजह है कि पिछले साल संयुक्त राष्ट्र वूमेन (यूएन वीमेन) ने दुनियाभर की सरकारों से लॉकडाउन के दौरान बढ़ रही घरेलू हिंसा को काबू करने और औरतों को हर हाल में राहत पहुंचाने की अपील की थी। राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक आज से ठीक एक साल पहले इसी दौरान यानी 25 मार्च से 31 मार्च के बीच आयोग ने कुल 1,477 घरेलू हिंसा की शिकायतें दर्ज की थी जो 2020 अप्रैल के मुकाबले 2.5 गुना ज्यादा थी।

यह हकीकत है कि किसी भी तरह के आर्थिक संकट का असर औरतों पर ज्यादा पड़ता है। और वैसे भी औरत जो घरेलू काम करती है उस काम की कहीं कोई गिनती नहीं होती। नेशनल स्टैटिस्टिकल ऑफिस के सर्वे Time use in India-2019 के मुताबिक औरतें घर के काम-काज में करीब पांच घंटे वक्त देती हैं और कोरोना में घरेलू भी और कामकाजी दोनों ही औरतों का घरेलू काम कहीं गुना बढ़ा है। स्वर्णा राजगोपालन का कहना है, ऐसा इसलिए भी होता है कि हम आज भी पुरुष प्रधान समाज में रह रहे हैं जहाँ मर्दों का घर का काम न करना बड़ा आम है। आदमी घर में वही काम करता है जिसमें वह घर के बाहर जा सके। वो केयर टेकर की तरह काम नहीं करता। उन्होंने बताया कि यह सिर्फ एक सोशल क्लास की ही बात नहीं है बल्कि हर क्लास में ऐसा होता आ रहा है।

कोरोना से पहले यूएन वीमेन रिपोर्ट का कहना था कि दक्षिण एशिया में 2021 तक औरतों में करीब 10 फीसद गरीबी आ सकती है लेकिन, अब इसके बढ़कर 13 प्रतिशत तक पहुंचने की उम्मीद है। रिपोर्ट ने 2030 तक अनुमान दिया है कि दक्षिण एशिया में पूरी दुनिया की सबसे गरीब औरतें और लड़कियाँ रह रहें होंगी मसलन पूरी दुनिया की गरीब औरतों की करीब 18.6 फीसद। इस हालात से वक्त रहते उबरने के लिए स्वर्णा राजगोपालन का मानना है, सक्षम औरतों को मदद के लिए आगे आना होगा। चाहे वह सीएसआर के तौर पर हो या उन्हें सीधेतौर पर कोई रोजगार, अनुदान या स्किल देकर। क्योंकि इसी के जरिए वर्कफोर्स में औरत-मर्द की हिस्सेदारी की बढ़ती खाई को रोका जा सकेगा। हालांकि, पूजा प्रियवदा का कहना है, आर्थिक सुरक्षा एक दोधारी तलवार है, औरत को अगर नौकरी करनी है तो उसके अपने मानसिक बोझ और तनाव है लेकिन, अगर वो आर्थिक रूप से पूरी तरह से आश्रित हो तो उसकी अपनी चिंता, औरतें कहीं भी आजाद या सुरक्षित नहीं। आर्थिक या अन्य जिम्मेदारियाँ जो भी हो मानसिक स्वास्थ्य को ठीक रखे बगैर इन्हें पूरा कर पाना असंभव है इसलिए इस पर ध्यान देना जरूरी है। हैरानी की बात है कि कोरोना में इन औरतों के खोते हुए रोजगार और उससे उनकी मानसिक सेहत पर पड़ रहे असर पर हाल-फिलहाल में कोई रिपोर्ट, अध्ययन या सर्वे अब तक सामने नहीं आया है। वक्त रहते हमें इस अदृश्य महामारी को फैलने से रोकना होगा, ये समझते हुए कि मानसिक तौर पर सेहतमंद औरत ही एक सेहतमंद परिवार और समाज की नींव होती है।

Narjis Husain is an award-winning writer, researcher and journalist. She has worked at the Hindustan Times Group (Hindi) for seven years (2000-2007) and as a senior researcher in Rajya Sabha Television (2011-2018). She has received multiple reputed national and international fellowships and awards including the Panos South Asia Media Fellowship, 2001-2003, Shaheed Niyogi Memorial Journalism Award 2003, Action Aid fellowship 2005, EU-India media award on reporting HIV/AIDS 2006, NFI Fellowship, 2015, SCARF Media Mental Health Award, 2021 and REACH Media Award on TB, 2022.



Violated and Degraded

Violence against women is endemic in Indian society, with one in three women having faced some form of violence during her life. The extent of violence faced by women was exposed during the pandemic when the reported incidents of crimes against women increased by 15.3% in 2021 compared to the year 2020 (National Crime Records Bureau). Proving once again that home is never really safe for women, especially when they are confined with the perpetrators of domestic violence.

A look at some of the findings of the research studies further exposes the extent of internalized misogyny, with 65% of Indian men believing that women should tolerate violence in order to keep the family together and that women sometimes deserve to be beaten. Additionally, the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) Questionnaire reported that 24% of Indian men had committed sexual violence at some point during their lives.

While crimes like murders and gang rapes get media attention, the violence and molestation that takes place in the garb of festivities and celebrations, be it in the *Garbha* pandals during *Dusseera* or the celebrations of *Holi*, remain mostly unreported. Exact statistics on the extent of those incidents are difficult to obtain, as a large number of cases go unreported. With the fear of ridicule, sense of shame and self-blame, victim blaming and immense pressure not to cause damage to the family's honour being some of the reasons for why such incidents go unreported.

Despite massive advancements, women continue to feel targeted and unsafe, no matter what their age is, even in times when entire communities come together to celebrate. In his piece titled, 'जबरदस्ती! छू लेता है कोई', Prashant Pratyush details how women are molested during Holi celebrations and how it impacts them. He goes on to further analyse the factors behind this troubling phenomenon - little societal support to resist, trivialization, and the burden of proof falling on the victims, to name a few. And supports his narrative with key statistics and case studies highlighting the prevalence of the issue.

While reporting on dowry deaths made big news a few decades back, in current times they do not seem to attract much media attention with the country being shaken by heinous rapes. Preeti Agyaat shines the light on dowry deaths in 'एक चिट्ठी, इस दुनिया की हर आयशा के नाम!', with a personal and heartfelt letter to 'Ayesha', a young bride who was forced to commit suicide in Sabarmati due to pressures of paying Dowry. Highlighting her situation and the living, breathing person she was.

Equally traumatic is the experience of being stalked which is recognized as a punishable crime under the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 under Section 354D (1) (1) and defined as 'an act where any man repeatedly follows and contacts a woman so as to foster

personal interaction despite a clear indication of disinterest by such a woman.’ The law makes stalking punishable with imprisonment up to 3 years along with a fine for the first conviction and imprisonment for up to 5 years with a fine in case of repeated offence.

Sukanya Shaji moves beyond the mere act of the murder of a woman by a stalker and deep dives into the very concept of male entitlement and lack of choice for women in her article **‘Youth stalks and murders female classmate on Kerala: Do women owe us their life choices?’**. She examines a critical subject - male entitlement and patriarchal mindsets that propagate the same. With the piece centring around the horrific story of the murder of a 22-year-old female student. As it explores the notion of women as ‘perpetual debtors’ and how important it is to really understand what it means for women to have the freedom of making their own choices. Her writing leaves us introspecting if we really understand and respect the freedom and choice of women.

Rarely does the media go back to the families dealing with the aftermath of heinous rape cases that are deeply embroiled in politics. Nidhi Suresh’s piece **‘Hathras: Four months on, Dalit girl’s family lives between court hearings and with ostracism’** critically examines the devastation left behind by the gruesome tragedy that took place in Hathras. It views the same from the perspective of the victim’s family and the challenges and stigma they face, as it gives a peek into the caste politics and stigma attached to rape at the community level. The piece is a poignant take on how those left behind deal with the broken pieces of such violent crimes and raises important questions regarding if crimes against women are ever truly accepted as crimes.

Sashikala VP and Mayank Jain in **‘Unsafe at home and outside: A conundrum of women’s safety in the capital’** explore how the capital now stands as one of the least safe places for women in the country. Diving into the cycle of trauma, violence, and lack of opportunities to escape that plague countless women in the city. As well as examining how the law enforcement and security infrastructure is ill-equipped and unprepared to deal with the volume and nature of crimes against women that are currently taking place.

Lastly, with **‘क्या सच में खुले से शौच मुक्त हो चुका है भारत? उन्नाव केस में एक मृतका के घर में नहीं है शौचालय!’**, Daya Sagar and Neetu Singh provide a much-required perspective on the horrific Unnao case, as they examine the impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission from a gender and caste lens. Highlighting, how till this day, discrimination and marginalization is still rampant.

13. जबरदस्ती! छू लेता है कोई

Prashant Pratyush | Prabhat Khabar Surbhi | December 12th, 2021

भारत सहित विश्वभर में महिलाएं आज अपनी काबिलियत के दम पर सफलता के परचम लहर रही हैं, बावजूद इसके वो आज भी आत्म-सम्मान और सुरक्षा के सवाल पर आशंकित होकर घर से बाहर निकलती हैं। घर के बाहर निकलते ही छोटी-मासूम बच्चियों से लेकर वृद्धाओं तक को छेड़छाड़, अश्लील हरकतें, बेहूदगी भरे भद्दे कमेन्ट्स सहित किसी के द्वारा जबरदस्ती छू कर गुजर जाने की असहनीय पीड़ा भी झेलनी पड़ती है। रोज घर की देहरी पार करते समय उनके लिए यह सवाल सबसे अहम है कि फलां जगह जाना सुरक्षित होगा या नहीं? आखिर कब और कैसे होगा इस पीड़ा का अंत.....?

इस बात से कोई इंकार नहीं कर सकता है कि असुरक्षित वातावरण और उसका भय जाने कितनी युवतियों एवं महिलाओं को घर के दायरे में कैद कर देता है। कई मौकों पर तो अभिभावक कम उम्र में ही लड़कियों को शादी के बंधन में बांध देने का फैसला कर लेते हैं या जब तक शादी के लायक न हो जाये, तब तक सुरक्षा के लिए निजी वाहन लेने का विचार करने पर विवश होते हैं। ऐसी घटनाएं दुनियाभर में महिलाओं के सैद्धांतिक अधिकारों का हनन है, जिसमें बिना किसी गलती के महिलाओं के मान-सम्मान को ठेस पहुंचायी जाती है, जिसका कभी अंत ही नहीं होता है। कई बार यह मामला रेप या एसिड अटैक जैसी चरम स्थिति तक पहुंच जाता है, इन सबका उसकी मनःस्थिति पर क्या प्रभाव पड़ता है, इसका कभी कोई वैज्ञानिक अध्ययन नहीं हुआ है, परंतु इतना तय है कि ऐसी घटनाएं प्रत्यक्ष या अप्रत्यक्ष रूप से उसके आत्मविश्वास पर प्रहार करती हैं।

सामाजिक स्तर पर प्रतिकार है जरूरी

कोई लड़की अगर कभी हिम्मत जुटा कर इसका प्रतिकार करती भी है, तो आसपास के लोग साथ खड़े नहीं होते, वे मौन रहने में ही अपनी भलाई समझते हैं। उनका मौन रहना जहां एक तरफ पीड़िता के विश्वासों को कमजोर करता है। वही छेड़छाड़ करने वाले मनचलों का हौसला बढ़ता है। इस तरह की घटनाएं रुक सके इसके लिए लड़कियों या महिलाओं के समर्थन में समाज और लोगों को आना पड़ेगा। पीड़ा देनेवाली इन घटनाओं को छोटी-सी बात न समझा जाये और इसका सामूहिक विरोध किया जाना बेहद जरूरी है, ताकि महिलाओं के प्रति हो रहे अपराधों को कम किया जा सके और पब्लिक स्पेस में उनकी भागीदारी सुनिश्चित हो सके।

हर उम्र की है यह परेशानी

ऐसा नहीं है कि छेड़खामी की समस्या किसी विशेष उम्र, वर्ग, जाति या धर्म की बच्चियों या महिलाओं को ही झेलनी पड़ती हैं। देश-दुनिया के हर कोने की अमूमन हर लड़की इससे परेशान है। आश्चर्य की बात तो यह है कि ऐसी हरकत करने वाले अशिक्षित, निचले तबके के बेरोजगार पुरुष ही नहीं, बल्कि संभ्रात वर्ग से आने वाले पढ़े-लिखे पुरुष भी शामिल हैं, ऐसा लगता है मानो हर कोई बस इस फिराक में बैठा है कि कब उसे मौका मिले और वह मजा ले सके। कुंठाओं से भरी यह मानसिकता महिलाओं को आंतरिक, शारीरिक, मौखिक और मानसिक पीड़ा देनेवाली है।

पीड़ित को गुनाहगार बताने का खेल

अक्सर किसी महिला तथा उसके परिवारवालों के लिए अपने साथ हुए छेड़छाड़ या अपराध को प्रमाणित करना बेहद कठिन होता है। कई लोग तो उसके लिए महिलाओं को ही दोषी मानने लगते हैं और दोष ठहराने के ऐसे-ऐसे कुतर्क गढ़ते हैं कि महिलाएं चुप्पी साधना बेहतर समझती हैं, जहां वह प्रतिकार करती है, तो घर-मुहल्ले, समाज सब जगह उनके चरित्र को लेकर कसीदे पढ़े जाने लगते हैं। वह वहां क्या कर रही थी? किस तरह के कपड़े पहने थे? उस समय वह घर से बाहर गयी ही क्यों थी? जैसे –तर्क लड़कियों या महिलाओं को अमर्यादित बताते के लिए काफी होते हैं।

विरोध जरूरी तो है पर.....

भारतीय दंड संहिता में छेड़खानी को अपराध की श्रेणी में शामिल करते हुए कहा गया है कि छेड़खानी एक दिमागी सोच का परिणाम है, इसमें आइपीसी की धारा 298 ए और बी के तहत शिकायत दर्ज होती है। विशाखा गाइडलाइंस के तहत निजी या सार्वजनिक संस्था में लड़कियों या महिलाओं के लिए शिकायत संबंधी कमेटी गठित करने की सिफारिश की गयी थी। बावजूद इसके वे समाज की तरफ से अपनी सुरक्षा के लिए तो वह कभी निश्चित नहीं हो पाती। शिकायतों के अंजाम तक पहुंचने के क्रम में ही उनके साथ इतना कुछ हट जाता है कि वे या तो घर के चारदीवारी में बंद हो जाती हैं या फिर आत्महत्या कर लेती हैं।

केस 1

गत सितंबर माह में बिहार पुलिस के एक आला अधिकारी की नाबालिग बेटी के साथ उसके घर के 50 वर्षीय रसोइये द्वारा छेड़खानी की सनसजीखेज घटना सामने आयी। जिसने हर किसी को चौंका दिया। इस मामले में इस घटना की जानकारी खुद बच्ची ने महिला पुलिस अधिकारी को फोन करने दी थी।

केस 2

गत माह धनबाद के सिंदरी स्थिति एक विद्यालय के दो शिक्षकों की ओर से सातवीं कक्षा की एक छात्रा के साथ छेड़खानी करने का मामला प्रकाश में आया। छात्रा की मां ने बच्ची के साथ छेड़खानी के मामले पर सिंदरी थाना में लिखित शिकायत दी और प्राचार्य व उप प्राचार्य पर मामला दबाने का आरोप लगाया।

केस 3

मई, 2020 में राजस्थान के झालावाड़ जिले में रहने वाली 17 वर्षीय छात्रा ने अपने घर में पंखे से लटक कर सुसाइड कर लिया था। उसकी मां द्वारा पुलिस को दिये बयान में बताया गया कि उनके पड़ोस का एक लड़का पिछले कई दिनों से उनकी बेटी के साथ छेड़छाड़ कर रहा था जिसके चलते लड़की काफी परेशान रहती थी और संभवतः इसी वजह से उसने अकेले होने पर यह खतरनाक कदम उठा लिया।

क्या कहते हैं आकड़े

हर 15 मिनट में एक महिला के साथ छेड़छाड़ होती है, लेकिन इनमें से 80 फीसदी मालमे या तो दर्ज नहीं किये जाते या फिर उनके विषय में कोई सुनवाई नहीं होती है।

वर्ष 2020 में देश में महिलाओं के खिलाफ अपराध के कुल 3,71,503 मामले दर्ज किये गये, जो 2019 में 4,05,326 थे और 2018 में 3,78,236 थे। (स्रोत: एनसीआरबी -2020)

Pratyush Prashant is a Delhi NCR-based freelance reporter who has worked on multiple articles that focuses on women's issues. With respect, independence, and a sense of community-building being core values represented through his work.



14. एक चिट्ठी, इस दुनिया की हर आयशा के नाम!

Preeti Agyaat | www.preetiagyaat.blogspot.com | March 1st, 2021

मेरी प्यारी आयशा,

अभी जबकि लगभग एक सप्ताह बाद पूरा देश मिलकर, महिलाओं को उनके दिवस की बधाई देने में जुट जाएगा, इस बीच तुमने साबरमती में कूदकर अपनी जान दे दी है। इतना ही नहीं बल्कि आत्महत्या से पहले एक वीडियो भी बनाया है जिसका एक-एक शब्द झकझोर कर रख देता है। जीवन के आखिरी पलों के दौरान भी अभिवादन की तुम्हारी तहज़ीब देखकर मैं हैरान हूँ। तुम अंत में थैंक यू कहना भी नहीं भूलतीं। लेकिन सच कहूँ तो तुम्हारी निडर आवाज़ और मुस्कान ने डरा दिया है मुझे। न जाने वो कौन से पल रहे होंगे कि तुमने मृत्यु को सुख पाने का मार्ग समझ लिया।

मुझे बेहद दुःख और अफ़सोस है कि हम इस दुनिया को तुम्हारे जीने लायक बनाने में विफल रहे। हम एक ही शहर के हैं पर कभी मिले नहीं। मेरा तुमसे जो नाता है वो साबरमती का है, रिवर फ्रंट का है। ये जगह मुझे हमेशा से सुकून भरी लगती रही है। तुमने भी अपने वीडियो में सुकून की बात कही है। पर कितना फ़र्क है तुम्हारे और मेरे सुकून में! तुम कहती हो "मैं हवाओं की तरह हूँ, बस बहना चाहती हूँ और बहते रहना चाहती हूँ। किसी के लिए नहीं रुकना"। और मैं चाहती हूँ कि काश तुम नदी के पानी से अठखेलियाँ करती और जीवन धार में बहती जातीं। हर संघर्ष का सामना करतीं। ये जीवन तुम्हारा अपना है, तुम्हें इसे पूरा और बेबाकी के साथ जीना था।

तुम्हारे चेहरे पर सहज मुस्कान है लेकिन आँखों में दर्द का इक सैलाब भरा है। एक ऐसा सैलाब, जिससे हर स्त्री किसी-न-किसी रूप में जरूर रिलेट कर सकेगी। तुम्हारे जो शब्द हैं, वो हमारे मस्तिष्क पर तमाचे की तरह पड़ते हैं। तमाचा, जो बार-बार यही याद दिलाता है कि तुम में और आयशा में कोई फ़र्क नहीं!

लेकिन ये बताओ कि इतनी मानसिक पीड़ा के बावजूद भी तुमने महान बनने का वह नैसर्गिक गुण क्यों नहीं छोड़ा? जिसे हम स्त्रियों ने सदियों से किसी मंगलसूत्र की तरह दिल से लगाकर रखा है। तुम्हें एक बार को भी नहीं लगा? कि जब तक स्त्रियाँ अन्याय को सहती रहेंगी, उसके विरोध में आवाज़ उठाने की बजाय चुप्पी साध लेंगी और उफ़ तक न करेंगी, तब तक उनकी असमय मृत्यु का ये दौर अनवरत जारी रहेगा! तुम्हें बहुत हिम्मत दिखानी थी, गुड़िया।

आयशा, तुम्हारी बातें सुन जितनी पीड़ा हुई है, उतना ही क्रोध भी आया है। यूँ भी दिल किया कि तुम्हें डाँटकर कहूँ "पागल लड़की! तुम्हें निकल आना था, उस ज़हनुम से! डूबते हुए भी तुम एक दहेज़ लोभी ईसान को बचाना चाहती हो? उसे बरी करना चाहती हो? ये कैसी मोहब्बत है तुम्हारी कि जिसने तुम्हारा जीवन बरबाद कर दिया, तुम अपनी जान देकर उसे बचा रही हो?" तुम्हारे पापा-मम्मी ने तुम्हें कितना रोका, कसमें दीं, मित्रतें कीं। यहाँ तक कि दहेज़ का केस वापिस लेने को भी

तैयार हो गए, तब भी तुम हार गई? तुम्हें नहीं पता कि तुम कितनी भाग्यशाली थीं कि तुम्हारे पेरेंट्स तुम्हारे साथ थे.

पता है, तुम केवल मोहब्बत हो! और तुम्हें खोने वाले अभागो. तुम अपने पिता से आग्रह करती हो कि *"कब तक लड़ेंगे अपनों से? आयशा लड़ाइयों के लिए नहीं बनी. प्यार करते हैं उससे, उसे परेशान थोड़े न करेंगे. अगर उसे आज़ादी चाहिए, ठीक है वो आज़ाद रहे".*

काश! तुम्हारी ये बात दुनिया समझ ले तो हर चीज़ सुंदर हो जाए. जो तुम ठहरती तो दुनिया आसानी से समझ पाती.

जानती हो, तुमसे कोई गलती नहीं हुई थी और न ही तुम में या तुम्हारी तकदीर में कोई कमी थी. बस, तुम अपने-आप को नहीं जान पाई. तुम उन अपनों को भी नहीं देख पाई जो तुमसे बेपनाह प्यार करते हैं. तुमने अपना जीवन एक ऐसे इन्सान की खातिर गँवा दिया, जिसे पैसे से प्यार था. लेकिन सारे इन्सान बुरे नहीं होते!

हाँ, तुम्हारी ये बात सच है कि *"मोहब्बत करनी है तो दोतरफा करो एकतरफा में कुछ हासिल नहीं!"* इसमें एक बात और जोड़ती हूँ कि मोहब्बत दोबारा भी हो सकती है. ये बात याद रखना अब.

तुम्हारा आखिरी फोन कॉल दिल दहला देने वाला है, आयशा. तुम्हारे आँसुओं ने बेहद रुलाया है. तुम्हारे माता-पिता का सोचकर भी कलेज़ा कांप उठता है. मैं उस पिता की निरीह अवस्था और हताशा को सोचती हूँ जिसे फ़ोन पर पता चलता है कि अगले ही पल उसकी बेटी नदी में छलांग लगाने वाली है. उस माँ के दर्द को समझने की नाकाम कोशिश करती हूँ जो बार-बार तुमसे रुकने का अनुरोध कर रही है. मासूम लड़की, तुम्हें परिस्थितियों का डटकर सामना करना था. अपने आप को किसी से कम नहीं आंकना था. तुम अपार संभावनाओं से भरा चेहरा थीं.

तुम्हारी विदाई का गुनहगार ये समाज भी है जो तुम्हारे लिए ऐसा वातावरण ही नहीं बना पाया कि तुम स्वयं को अकेला न महसूस कर सको. या फिर इसे तुम्हें अकेले चलना सिखा देना चाहिए था. तुम्हें बता देना चाहिए था कि तुम्हारी मुस्कान, तुम्हारे जीवन की तरह कितनी अनमोल है.

मैं तुम जैसी तमाम लड़कियों से कहना चाहती हूँ कि आखिर हम क्यों अपने सपनों और खुशियों को किसी और के जीवन से जोड़ें? हम क्यों न अपने हक़ की लड़ाई खुद लड़ें? किसी से इतनी अपेक्षा क्यों रखे कि उनके पूरा न होने पर हम ही टूट जाएँ. आत्महत्या, तो अवसाद की पराकाष्ठा है. हम इस राह से बाहर निकल, आत्मसम्मान के साथ जीना क्यों न चुनें? सब अच्छे लोग यूँ दुनिया को छोड़ देना चुन लेंगे, तो इसे संवारेगा कौन?

तुम जहाँ भी हो, हर खुशी तुम्हारे साथ हो.

स्नेह तुम्हें

प्रीति अज्ञात

लेखिका, ब्लॉगर

संस्थापक एवं संपादक

'हस्ताक्षर' मासिक वेब पत्रिका

Preeti Agyaat is an Ahmedabad based author, editor, and blogger. She has contributed to and worked with various prestigious national and state-level publications. She writes poetry, short stories, satirical commentaries as well as articles and blog posts on socially relevant issues.

<https://preetiagyaat.blogspot.com/2021/03/blog-post.html>



15. Youth stalks and murders female classmate in Kerala: Do women owe us their life choices?

Sukanya Shaji | www.feminisminindia.com | October 5th, 2021



A 22-year-old female student was allegedly stabbed to death by a classmate in the Kottayam district of Kerala on October 1st. The incident took place in broad daylight, within the premise of the St. Thomas College, Pala, where the woman had come to give her exam. Eyewitnesses recall that the accused and the deceased were seen arguing under a mango tree, post which the man slit her throat with a paper cutter knife. She was immediately rushed to the hospital but she succumbed to her injuries.

The police, upon investigation, suspect that this was a planned murder since the man had purchased the paper cutter about a month ago. Both the deceased and the accused were third-year students of Food Technology in the same college. The accused had been stalking the woman and had recently sent threatful messages to her mother.

An incident of this nature, where a woman is stalked and attacked by a male acquaintance is unfortunately not an isolated one. In August, a 24-year-old medical student was stalked and allegedly shot to death by her former romantic partner, who shot himself thereafter. The two were in a relationship from which the woman had earlier withdrawn. She resorted to mediation by the police in the presence of the parents of both parties when the man was relentless in his refusal to accept her choice to part ways. He then stalked her for a month to 'pursue' her to get back together with him before shooting her at her place of residence.



Image: [The News Fetcher](#)

If it is not already upsetting to witness the violent loss of young women's lives as a consequence of their choices in personal relationships, it is more devastating to note how a large section of people on social media responds to incidents like this. Numerous users defend male violence against their female partners or love interests citing the emotional pain a man goes through when rejected by a partner. The destructive energy of a man who has been told off or broken up with by a woman is often romanticised, glorified, and normalised through these narratives.

Mainstream media further sensationalises such incidents by investigating the 'demeanour' of the woman, whether her refusal to be with the man was 'legitimate', or if she had other relationships. The motive of such reductions is to gauge if the woman 'brought violence upon herself' by triggering an otherwise 'well-meaning', 'lovestruck' man's sentiments.



Image: [HuffPost](#)

When a woman decides to put an end to a romantic relationship, we are quick to caricature her personhood, morality, and agency. We feel entitled as a society to judge the personal choices of women and assume collective custodianship of their lives. As we continuously demand justifications from women for their actions and weigh whether or not they deserved

to die at the hands of a jilted lover, there is a very fundamental question we fail to ask – *do women owe us anything in the first place?*

The concept of women as ‘perpetual debtors’

Australian philosopher and academic Kate Manne, in her latest book ‘Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women’, contextualises the socio-political position of women in a patriarchal economy. Women are expected to transact goods that are traditionally assigned as ‘feminine’, like care, nurture, subservience, and acceptance. They are conditioned to refrain from ‘masculine’ pursuits such as power, authority, and assertion.

Professor Kate argues that this creates an inherent, discriminatory dichotomy of how women are placed in a male-dominated economy. They are by default denied access to bigger pursuits, and ambitions, and are made to feel they always owe their lives to someone else because it is their duty to serve, without partaking in autonomous decision-making. This, in turn, encourages men to develop a sense of superior entitlement which convinces them that women owe them their time, energy, and autonomy. Consequently, in a gendered economy, women become perpetual debtors.

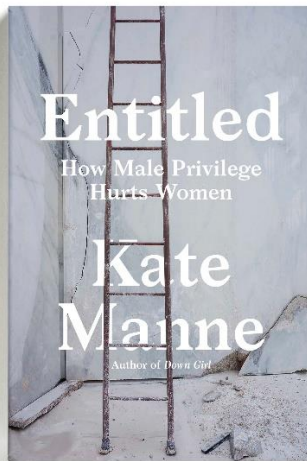


Image: [The New York Times](#)

Professor Kate’s extrapolation of the gendered economy and her positioning of gender roles as ‘*goods and services*’, throws valuable light on why most men feel they deserve to call the shots in every equation – public, personal or professional where a woman is involved.

The dominant conscience of male entitlement is reflected in all social, cultural, political, and popular culture narratives because these avenues which act as centres of knowledge production are predominantly managed, controlled, and presided over by men.

This foundational conscience elbows us to think that in romantic relationships, women owe men their unquestioning presence. Anyone who tries to break this cycle by asserting agency is deemed to be deserving of consequences. When we juxtapose intersectionalities like caste, class, and sexuality into this power dynamic, it can be observed that male entitlement is directly connected to male violence on women, non-binary and trans individuals.

Crimes against women are crimes of male entitlement

In the latest report of the *National Crime Records Bureau*, it is cited that thirty percent of crimes recorded against women in the country are crimes of cruelty by the husband or his relatives. If we scrutinise the reportage of crimes against women that appear in the media, we can see that most of them have titles like ‘*Revenge killing*’, ‘*Acid attack*’, ‘*Domestic abuse*’, ‘*Dowry death*’, ‘*Love crime*’, ‘*Cyber abuse*’, and so on.

The common thread that runs steadily through all these instances is the hostility towards the bodies and lives of women who do not serve male interests the way they are ‘*supposed to*’. The fact that most men feel entitled to abuse their wives, stalk their female love interests, threaten their ex-partners with acid bulbs, or dehumanise them on social media when they move on in their personal lives and ultimately use fatal brute force to claim women’s bodies dead or alive, is a dangerous indication of patriarchy’s unfettered validation of male privilege.

Patriarchy sanctions male entitlement as acceptable masculine behaviour, thereby leaving no room to take cognisance of the damage it does to women and minorities.



Image: [Democratic Alliance](#)

These crimes are not just crimes against women, but also crimes of male entitlement. We must look at them as violence ensuing from the agitation of the bruised, proprietary male ego that simply cannot accept the prospect of not being in control.

The shift in perception of crimes against women as crimes stemming from unchecked male entitlement places the onus of violence against women on the problematic possession of female identities by patriarchy. This also offers a counter-narrative to victim blaming, one of patriarchy's beloved defence mechanisms to further ascribe the blame of male violence on women's conduct.

Women do not owe us anything

Popular morality brands the woman who chooses to walk out of a relationship as impatient, unforgiving, vile, and if she is a mother, unbecoming. We stress the '*misgivings*' of the man and collectively urge women to '*give them chances*', despite constant gaslighting, abuse, and manipulation. If not, we chastise them and assassinate their characters. This is not only condescending but also extremely toxic.

Women are people of their own who can choose to move in and out of relationships on their own terms, just like anyone else. They do not require to carry an excess burden of morality or wait for social sanctions to exercise agency.



Image: [Restless](#)

As difficult as it is for a patriarchal society to stomach this, there are no two ways about the fact that women do not owe us anything. Responses like '*she deserved it*', '*she should have not enraged him*', or '*he was deeply hurt by her*', do not, in any context justify the brutalisation of women who make their rightful choices, whether one likes it or not. We must seek out healthy coping mechanisms to navigate complicated situations in our private lives because violence stems from a need for control and the territorial attitude of one gender over the other must not be validated in any society.

We might like to believe women must deliberate on their choices so as to not usurp the established gendered power dynamics because that is not very '*womanly*'. This is nothing but our conditioned morality taking over our capacity for an egalitarian conscience. Female assertion threatens male privilege and this leads to the increase in the subordination of women who question the status quo and the glorification of those who conform to it. Women appear as defiant and deserving of punishment when they assert their personhood because we expect them to be passive. We want women to internalise a feeling of moral

and material indebtedness, a sense of responsibility to make sure everyone is happy with their choices – a filter that is seldom applicable to men.

Women do not owe their choices, bodies, time, wardrobe, ambitions, identities, or existence to anyone. It is not on women to endure unfulfilling relationships and ‘mother’ their male partners until they mend their ways. This might be a difficult fact to accept even for women since all our social and political structures train women to be givers, not takers, or even negotiators. But this is a battle we must fight internally as individuals, and systemically as a society.

Sukanya Shaji is a lawyer-turned-journalist who holds a graduation in law, a post-graduation in philosophy, and a post-graduate diploma in print journalism. Her journalistic work is deeply focused on gender, power structures, and intersectionalities, and appear in Feminism In India, True Copy Think, and The News Minute. She is also a published poet and was awarded the All India Poetry Prize in 2015.

<https://feminisminindia.com/2021/10/05/youth-stalks-and-murders-female-classmate-in-kerala-nithina/>



16. Hathras: Four months on, Dalit girl's family lives between court hearings and ostracism

Nidhi Suresh | www.newslaundry.com | January 6th, 2021



Asha's family

The tall bajra crops have been scythed for harvest. Short green potato plants now occupy the land.

Things have changed in Hathras. It's been close to four months since the gangrape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit girl, Asha, in the bajra fields of Chanda village, which lies in the Hathras district of western Uttar Pradesh.

The field in which Asha was gang-raped on the morning of September 14, 2020, lies barren and ignored. Nothing grows there. The CBI has sealed it.

Asha died on September 29. Four Thakur men – Sandeep, Ravi, Ramu and Luvkush – have been arrested.

"I don't go that side anymore unless I am asked to reconstruct the day of her rape," her mother said.

Weight of sadness

Four months on, the relatives have departed for their own homes. The house in which Asha once lived is now occupied by her parents, her two brothers, a sister-in-law, and three nieces.

"This is a house that functions mechanically," said Asha's father, sitting on a charpoy. *"We sleep because it is night and we wake up because it is day."* He picked up Asha's five-year-old niece and placed her on his lap. *"You know, when Asha was in the hospital...Even in that terrible condition she just wanted to see this little girl,"* he said, tears rolling down his cheeks. *"She kept telling me, 'Papa, take me home. I want to play with Aditi again.'"*

As with every other family member in the house, Asha's three nieces all hold onto memories of their aunt, in their own way. Aditi was playing outside the house on the day Asha was raped. *"She heard us scream, she saw Asha naked, bleeding and strangled when we brought her inside,"* said Aditi's father, Asha's brother. *"It scarred her. Sometimes, she wakes up and cries at night. She has been robbed of her innocence in every way."*

Did Aditi comprehend what had happened to her aunt? *"Yes, in whatever way a five-year-old can,"* her father said. *"In fact, the CBI questioned her too."*

As we spoke, Asha's three-year-old niece playfully covered her head and face with a white towel. Lifting her make-believe veil, she said, *"Bua, bua."* Bua is aunt, father's sister.



Asha's three-year-old niece.

The family laughed and Asha's brother said, *"She does this all the time. This is how she remembers Asha. She also thinks every young woman who comes home is Asha."*

The third niece was only 11 days old when Asha was gang-raped.

"When it all happened and our house was so crowded with the media, police, and other people, it was so difficult for us to pay attention to our newborn," her father said. *"Of*

course, she is a baby and doesn't understand anything. But we keep feeling like we couldn't give her what a newborn child needs in those crucial months after birth."

Asha's mother now spends her days attending to her three grandchildren. *"I struggle to sleep because Asha and I used to go to bed at the same time every night,"* she said. *"Sometimes I feel delusional because I can see Asha running around, playing with the Children during the day."*

Before Asha's death, the family-owned five or six buffalos. Those were sold, and they currently have one buffalo and a calf. They also gave half their land to a relative to farm. Both Asha's brothers can no longer go to work because they have to attend court hearings.

They also worry about their safety. A few months ago, Asha's brother said, a large group of Karni Sena members wanted to visit them. The organisation subscribes to the view that Asha's death was a case of honour killing, and had demanded that her family be killed. *"Finally, the police stopped the large group and escorted their leaders to our house. If they had all come here, they would have killed us, I'm sure,"* the brother said, adding that such threats have become common since the incident.

"Life has changed so suddenly for all of us," Asha's father said. *"We try to pass our time counting the days to the next court hearing."*



Asha's village in Hathras district, western Uttar Pradesh.

Security and betrayals

In the days following Asha's gangrape and subsequent death, the road leading to her house was littered with plastic cups and dotted with media and police personnel. It's now empty, apart from around 15-20 Central Reserve Police Force personnel.

On October 27, the Supreme Court said that Asha's family, as witnesses, must be provided security by the CRPF instead of the UP Provincial Armed Constabulary, or PAC, which had been guarding the family since September. The transition took place on November 1

and the CRPF continues to stand guard. They have built three plastic bunkers, one in the outhouse area, another at the entrance of the house, and a third on the roof. The metal detector at the entrance of the house is one of the few remnants of the PAC's presence.



CRPF personnel and the metal detector.

Asha's family said they feel safer with the CPRF than with the PAC. Her older brother, who walked me into the house, said, *"We had no faith in the UP police. Half the time, we were scared of them. They spoke to us very rudely and let anyone inside the house."* The brother said the CRPF personnel were 'very considerate', 'did not disturb the family', and always checked with them before letting in a visitor.

The family has good reason to mistrust the UP police. Asha's body was forcibly cremated by the police without a single family member being present. The police had claimed Asha wasn't raped and that the incident was part of an 'international plot' to defame the Uttar Pradesh government.

On October 2, days after Asha's death, the district magistrate of Hathras, Praveen Kumar Laxkar, was caught on tape threatening the family and asking them to comply with the UP police. On December 31, after much debate, he was transferred to Mirzapur. Does this make the family feel better?

"No, what sort of reassurance should that give us?" said Asha's older brother. "He should be terminated from his post. Until then, there won't be justice."

The family had also wanted an investigation headed by a retired Supreme Court judge; in October, they had opposed the CBI investigation ordered by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Ajay Bisht. Nevertheless, the CBI did take over the investigation and concluded in two months that Asha had been gang-raped and murdered and that the four accused must be convicted.

“In a way, we are relieved with the CBI’s conclusions,” said Asha’s father. “But we want the case to be transferred out of Uttar Pradesh now. We don’t trust anything here.”

This is something else the family has been asking for since October, that the trial in the case is transferred out of the state. On October 27, the Supreme Court assured the family the transfer plea would be considered after the CBI probe. The family awaits this now.

Progress of the case

On December 18, 2020, the CBI concluded its investigation. A 2,000-page charge sheet was handed over to the lawyers of the victim and the four accused on Monday, January 4, 2021.

With regards to Asha, there are two simultaneous cases going on. The first, of her gangrape and murder, is at the district court. The second is at the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court, which took suo motu cognizance of the case, and is looking into her forced cremation and the role of state officials in botching the investigation.

On Monday, the four accused – Sandeep, Ramu, Ravi and Luvkush – were produced in court before special judge BD Bharti. Munna Singh Pundir, the lawyer appearing for all four, said the court heard no arguments and fixed the next hearing for January 29. *“Even though the families of all four accused were there, the men could not meet them,”* he said.

Newslaundry met the families of the accused at their home in Hathras after they had returned from the district court. But they refused to speak.

“We don’t want to speak to the media,” said Luvkush’s mother. *“You let us down.”*

Pundir said the court also gave special directions to the media. *“The judge clearly said the media must not analyse the trial or the evidence and must stick to pure reporting,”* he said.

A silent village

A local reporter who refused to be named visits Asha’s family almost every day.

“This is a quiet village. Nobody had even heard of Hathras before this case and now it will always be known for this,” he said.

He added that among local reporters, there’s still a consensus that this was a case of honour killing. *“Why didn’t she say she was raped immediately? Why did it take so long?”* he asked. When asked about the CBI investigation concluding that Asha had been gang-raped, he said, *“It’s all a political gamble.”*

Asha's village is physically divided on caste lines. Her family is Dalit, belonging to the Valmiki caste. Apart from four Valmiki families, the village is occupied by Pandits and Thakurs.

For a month, after Asha's case became a cause for national outrage, the village was flooded with reporters trying to speak to everyone. Back then, villagers had shut their doors, police personnel patrolled the lanes 24 hours a day, and villagers had been told by the police to refrain from speaking to the media.

Now, the police have left. Barring the CRPF men and their bunkers outside Asha's house, a sense of normalcy has returned to the village. Until that is, they see another reporter. Once again, the doors shut and the villagers refuse to speak.

Anupam, a local who reluctantly spoke to *Newslandry*, said she never knew Asha. How come?

"We're Thakur and they're Valmiki, why would I speak to her?" she said. When asked if Asha's gangrape has made the women of the village scared or apprehensive, she said, *"When no rape has happened, why will we feel scared?"*

A group of men sitting outside a house asked me who I was and which channel I worked for. Refusing to be named, one of them quietly said, *"We have lost faith in the CBI. They said she was raped. How can they say that when it's a clear case of honour killing?"*

Meanwhile, Asha's family feels more ostracised than before. *"Earlier, people didn't speak to us because we were Dalit,"* her father said. *"Now they reject us because our daughter got raped."*

Had they thought about leaving the village?

"Yes, we thought of it for some time. But where will we go?" he said. *"We were born Valmiki and grew up in this environment of rejection. Our caste and now the identity of being a rape victim's family is not going to change by shifting houses, right?"*

As I prepared to leave Asha's house, her father stopped me. *"How long after the rape were Nirbhaya's rapists hanged?"* he asked.

Seven years and three months, I replied.

"Well," he sighed, *"I guess it will be a long time before I sleep peacefully then."*

The names of the victim and her family members have been changed to protect their identities.

Nidhi Suresh began her career in 2017 as a correspondent in Kashmir where she covered militarization, militancy, politics, policy and gender. Post that, she was based in Delhi and worked with Newslaundry where her prime focus was sexual violence, crime and politics for two years, reporting extensively reported on the Covid pandemic, farmers' protests and the Hathras gangrape and murder case. Currently, she works as an online reporter for Deutsche Welle.

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/01/06/hathras-four-months-on-dalit-girls-family-lives-between-court-hearings-and-with-ostracism>



17. Unsafe at home and outside: A conundrum of women's safety in the capital

Sashikala VP, Mayank Jain | The Patriot | August 25th, 2021



According to a report, crime against women and children – from rape to abduction — in Delhi's Outer District is one of the highest recorded over the last three years. All this, despite reluctance to report. Patriot visits Peera Garhi relief camp to see how women live – with fear looming all around.

A hot, humid day in Delhi, face mask drenched in sweat. Travelling through its Outer District we meet 29-year-old Poonam sitting on a *charpoi* set outside her home in Peera Garhi relief camp. As we begin to speak to her, it soon dawns on us that the heat means nothing to her, instead the prospect of the monsoon showers presents a relief from the confines of a house which has clung on to her.

Married at the age of 14, this camp has been her home since she was born. She now faces a Covid-19 lockdown-induced financial crisis, losing her job in a beauty salon. But hardships are not something alien to her. Made to give up her dream of finishing school – removed after class 7– then married off to a man, who would eventually subject her to physical and mental abuse, she also raises their two children. But Poonam's story, in her own words, is almost decidedly all too common here.

"It's normal that my husband comes home drunk and beats all of us, it's the story of many of the women here...I am telling you openly but very few would be willing to share," she says. What's also common in lives such as Poonam's, is that despite her seeking police intervention, the personnel are many a times directed to suggest an 'adjustment', an 'understanding' so to speak.

Sharing her story with two strangers out to report on crimes against women, Poonam says *"I have called the police many times. They come and say it's your internal matter, resolve it yourself. Usually when he becomes violent, I just come out of the house and sit on the road till he sleeps off, what else can I do?"*



Many women hesitate to approach the police, especially in cases of assault because officials "don't listen"

And outside, lurk other dangers. *"Theft, pickpocketing, boys and men taking drugs. Women usually don't venture out after it's late,"* pointing to the irony that while she may feel unsafe outside, she runs to its protection when her husband turns abusive.

One common thing that *Patriot* found was the reluctance of women to report crimes. Like Poonam, several women told us that the police 'don't listen'. This was the sentiment that every woman we spoke with conveyed to us at the Ambedkar camp, located approximately 500 meters away from Peera Garhi camp. Also, since a lot of people use common toilets, which are 100-200 meters away from their houses — the dangers of going out at night are well entrenched in women's minds. And parents have taught kids about dangers lurking in the dark, as they are advised to not go out after 7 pm, a curfew time.

What was also evident is that women do not know of the helpline number available expressly for them – which is 1091 for women in distress – other than the emergency number '100'.

Social rights activist and human rights campaigner, Shabnam Hashmi, believes crimes against women are in fact 'highly underreported'. Pointing to the problem being in the first step of the relief itself, which is the police, she says, *"the police's attitude is highly patriarchal, even if they (the victim) go to the women's cell, it's not a conducive atmosphere."*

Hashmi explains further, *"it's a vicious circle, good to or easy to say that we should sensitize the police but when there is so much of violence all around, and politics of violence is promoted by the state then women suffer the most. Police don't interact with women."*



At Ambedkar camp, homes do not have toilets and instead have to use the ones built by the government outside. While women here did not complain of any bad incident, young girls said they tried to limit themselves from going there at night

She does point to the positive, which is the current Delhi Commission of Women (DCW), *“DCW is relatively more active, so they do send teams to interact with women.”*

Praja foundation’s report ‘State of Policing and Law & Order in Delhi’ from 2019 suggests that women were reluctant to go to the police when any crime happens. It says that out of the respondents, there were 36% male respondents who had faced a crime, and 34% women. At the same time, out of those, 77% of male respondents informed the police compared to 69% of female respondents. Moreover, while 30% of male respondents were satisfied with the police, only 23% of female respondents felt the same.

However, Praja’s report also points to the Outer Delhi police district as one where the highest number of rapes, molestation, kidnapping or abduction cases have been reported over three years. This, despite reluctance to report.

Delhi Police’s outer district covers Mangolpuri, Nirman vihar, Raj Park, Nangloi, Peera Garhi, and Paschim Vihar – under whose jurisdiction Poonam’s house falls – and others.

While the number of rape cases declined over the years that Praja has mapped the crimes, it still remains highest in the Outer Delhi police district. In 2016-17 there were 362 rape cases reported, in the year 2017-18 it was 308, and then in 2018-19, there were 218 such cases reported. Likewise, in cases of molestation, in 2016-17 a total of 561 cases were reported, followed by 382 in 2017-18 and lastly 378 in 2018-19.

Then for cases of kidnapping and abduction, the district saw a total of 1,145 cases in 2016-17, in the year 2017-18 there were 1,023 reported and in 2018-19 a total of 863.

Reena Banerjee, a social activist, and founder of Nav Srishti – an NGO which works towards preventing violence, abuse, and exploitation of women and children – backs the findings of high incidences of crimes mentioned in the district.

“All types of crime are prevalent here in high numbers. Be it petty crime, drug trade, or crimes against children and women. From the start, we have been saying that the outer district is very dangerous for women and children. We can put this down to the high density of population in the outer district, many who are extremely poor, and are migrants.”

Child protection missing in Capital

According to NCRB data, there were 7,783 cases of crimes against children filed in 2019. The highest incidences of crime reported were kidnapping or abduction with 5,537 cases in Delhi with 5,700 victims. Furthermore, 382 children were victims of Human Trafficking (Secs. 370 & 370A IPC) in Delhi in the same year. The total POCSO cases were 1719.

In terms of ‘Court Disposal of Crime against Children’ in 2019, according to the NCRB data, 13,541 cases were pending from the previous year, in Delhi, whereas 2,386 cases were sent for trial in 2019. Then cases in which trials were completed were just 1,523 while 1,544 were disposed of by courts.

The Delhi Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) in its performance report this year pointed out that more than 6,000 children go missing in Delhi every year.

“In the last year, the Commission has issued notice to Delhi Police in cases of 5227 FIR lodged wherein children were reported missing. Out of these cases of missing children, 1,690 children have already been traced by July 2021. Also, 48 of these children traced were found to be survivors of child sexual abuse, and hence are being closely provided backing by the Commission...”

Delhi also makes for the metropolitan city with the biggest chunk of crimes against children, among 19 cities, with 7,565 cases of crimes against children reported, followed by Mumbai at 3,640 cases of crimes against children.

While incidences of crimes against women and children are not localized in one area, the Outer district witnesses many cases of kidnapping and abduction. Banerjee, who has set up vigilance groups in these areas, speaks on the need for more attention to crimes against children, *“If you look at the data, you will find that the outer district is always high. Many cases of elopement and many who have left, but have been raped. Then there are also cases of those who have then been trafficked. One aspect which can be looked into by the government is to have a verification process of residents. It happens in good localities. Here one can commit a crime and disappear. It becomes very hard to trace them.”*

“Then there are those who commit crimes against their own family members (with most cases of rape perpetrated by a family member), go out and do the same. The government must support parents who are both working and unable to watch their child during the day. The child returns from an Anganwadi and spends the rest of the day alone. That child can be raped, there’s no one to see this child. Such incidents are very prevalent in these areas

and you'll find them in greater numbers. The solution is to have creche facilities in the Anganwadi, for which discussions are currently on."



While incidences of crimes against women and children are not localized in one area, the Outer district witnesses many cases of kidnapping and abduction

Banerjee also points to the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS), *"Here one of the clauses for a Bal Suraksha Dal is through a panchayat. But in the case of the urban sector of Delhi, the protection group doesn't come into being because there's no panchayat to form it. But if we are able to create this group it could really help in preventing such crimes."*

For the police, Banerjee says for the protection of women and children the methods are quite the same, one is to identify hotspots, have continued vigilance by the police at these spots, night patrolling, lights in all areas and presence of functional and monitored CCTV cameras.

Female representation for security and redressal

This year until June 15, Delhi police data shows that a total of 833 rape (376 IPC) cases have been reported.

In the case of 'Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage Her Modesty' (354 IPC), a total of 1,022 have been registered until June 15 of this year. Then in 'Insult to the Modesty of Women' (509 IPC) a total of 197 cases have been registered, a whopping 1,580 cases of kidnapping of women, and lastly, the greatest number of cases reported in the crimes against women under section 498-A/406 IPC which deals with 'Cruelty by Husband and In Laws' which has seen 1,712 cases registered.

When crime against women is rampant, it is pertinent that the number of women cops must be significant. But still, their number is well below the targeted 33 percent, only 12.30 percent of women cops are in the Delhi police. This is when the Delhi police is one of the best in the country in terms of infrastructure, strength and budgeting.

In March this year, the DCW served a notice to Delhi police as none of the 178 police stations had a women SHO.

DCW chief Swati Maliwal said, *“We have been informed that there are no women SHOs in any of the 178 police stations in Delhi. This is very shocking and disappointing at the same time. It is very important to ensure gender parity in the force.”*

HT quoted a senior officer replying on the issue, *“There are no criteria of being a male and female officer in matters of posting. Presently, two women IPS officers are heading two separate police districts, besides two women DCPs in crime and PCR. There have been many women inspectors who served as SHOs in Delhi’s police stations”.*

It is clear that the paucity of women cops and lack of efforts in policing are a few of the major causes of crimes against women. Despite that, strong measures to curb these crimes are largely missing.

Sashikala VP has over eight years of experience in journalism, with a passion for telling stories from the ground. She is a principal correspondent at The Patriot, reporting on governance, government policies, labour and minority rights. Additionally, she bylines on NewsLaundry, along with exclusive reports.



Mayank Jain is a journalist and writer who has been reporting on human rights, culture, politics, and the environment for the past four years. He has written for several publications including The Wire, Outlook, News Laundry, Al Jazeera, and Asia Democracy Chronicles. Currently, he is working with Outlook Magazine, as a Senior Correspondent.



<https://thepatriot.in/reports/unsafe-at-home-outside-a-conundrum-of-womens-safety-in-the-capital-22451>

18. क्या सच में खुले से शौच मुक्त हो चुका है भारत? उन्नाव केस में एक मृतका के घर में नहीं है शौचालय!

Daya Sagar, Neetu Singh | www.gaonconnection.com | February 22nd, 2021



उन्नाव केस में एक मृतका के घर का पीछे का हिस्सा, जहां शौचालय के अभाव में कुछ इस तरह काम चलाया जाता है। (फोटो- नीतू सिंह)

दो दलित लड़कियों की हत्या के बाद पूरे देश में बबुरहा गांव सुर्खियों में आ गया है। विपक्ष ने भी सरकार को दलित और बेटियों की सुरक्षा को लेकर घेरा। लेकिन इस दौरान लोगों और कैमरों की निगाहों से कुछ चीजें छूट गईं वो थे गांव में उनके घर और शौचालय। दो में से एक मृतका के घर शौचालय नहीं है, जबकि यूपी अपने आप को 2018 में ही खुले में शौच से मुक्त घोषित कर चुका है।

किसी भी वक़्त गिर पड़ने वाली मिट्टी की दीवार से सटे बांस और लकड़ी के सहारे कुछ पुरानी साड़ियां, कुछ बोरियां और प्लास्टिक से एक आड़ की जगह बनी है। इस परिवार को स्वच्छ भारत मिशन के तहत शौचालय नहीं मिला है। यह जगह प्रदेश की राजधानी से मात्र 40 किलोमीटर दूर स्थित उन्नाव जिले के बबुरहा गाँव में उस एक दलित मृतका के घर की है, जिसकी 17 फरवरी को खेत में घास लेने के दौरान संदिग्ध अवस्था में मौत हो गयी थी। पुलिस ने मृतका की जहर देने के आरोपी को गिरफ्तार कर लिया है।

मृतका का घर गांव के मुख्य रास्ते पर है, जहाँ लोगों का अवागमन हमेशा रहता है। घटना के कुछ दिन पहले मृतका ने अपनी पड़ोसन भाभी को बताया था कि रात में जब वो पेशाब करने के लिए आंगन में आती है, तो उसे डर लगता है कि कहीं कोई अनहोनी न हो जाए। यह डर सिर्फ उस बच्ची

का नहीं था। इस गाँव में हमने जितनी भी लड़कियों और महिलाओं से बात की, जो खुले में शौच जाती हैं, सभी ने लगभग यही बताया कि उन्हें खेत में खुले में शौच जाने से डर लगता है।



एक पीड़िता का घर (फोटो- नीतू सिंह)

बबुरहा गाँव में यह सिर्फ एकमात्र घर नहीं है जिसमें शौचालय न बना हो, मृतका के घर के आसपास कुछ ऐसे घर और भी हैं, जिन्हें स्वच्छ भारत मिशन के तहत शौचालय की सुविधा नहीं मिली है। जिन घरों में शौचालय बने हुए भी हैं, वे इस्तेमाल करने की स्थिति में नहीं हैं। किसी का गड्ढा जाम है, तो किसी का दरवाजा जर्जर है, वहीं कोई इसे नहाने के लिए इस्तेमाल करता है।

गांव के ही 40 वर्ष के एक पुरुष ने नाम ना छापने की शर्त पर गांव कनेक्शन को बताया, "ये शौचालय इस स्थिति में नहीं बने हैं कि इन्हें इस्तेमाल किया जा सके। सिर्फ कागजी कोटा पूरा करने के लिए जल्दबाजी में ऐसे शौचालय बना दिए गये हैं।" इस घटना के बाद से पड़ोस में रहने वाली एक महिला ने भी चिंता जताई, "हमारी बेटी 12 साल की है, खेत में काम करने तो नहीं जाती पर खुले में शौच के लिए तो रोज जाती है। इस घटना के बाद से अब मुझे हमेशा उसके साथ जाना पड़ेगा।"

सरकारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार बबुरहा गांव जिस पाठकपुर ग्राम पंचायत में आता है, वह ओडीएफ घोषित हो चुका है। गांव के निवर्तमान प्रधान धर्मेन्द्र त्रिपाठी गांव कनेक्शन से बातचीत में कहते हैं, "हमारा गांव ओडीएफ घोषित हो चुका है। हमारी पंचायत में सिर्फ 10 प्रतिशत घर ऐसे हैं, जिसमें शौचालय नहीं बना है। इन घरों में भी शौचालय बनने के लिए पंचायत की तरफ से प्रशासन को प्रस्ताव जा चुका है।"

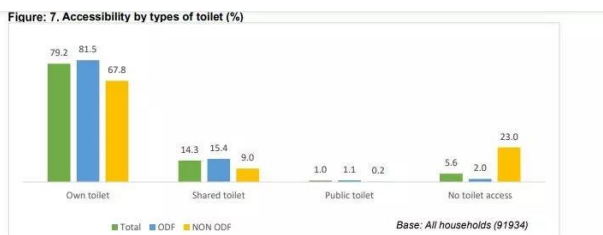


बबुरहा गांव में जर्जर अवस्था में पड़ा एक शौचालय

त्रिपाठी ने बताया कि उनके ग्राम पंचायत में कुल तीन गांव पाठकपुर, मालाखेड़ा और बबुरहा हैं, जिनमें लगभग 1000 घर हैं। जहां पाठकपुर में 700 से अधिक घर हैं, वहीं मालाखेड़ा और बबुरहा में लगभग 150-150 घर हैं। "कुल मिलाकर 900 घरों में शौचालय है। जिन 100 घरों में उनमें 30 परिवार दलित समुदाय से संबंध रखते हैं।" गांव कनेक्शन संवाददाता ने पाया कि बबुरहा गांव में दलित समुदाय से संबंध रखने वाले लगभग 10 परिवार हैं, जिनमें से लगभग आधे घरों में शौचालय की सुविधा नहीं है।

उन्नाव जिले के जिला पंचायत राज अधिकारी राजेन्द्र प्रसाद ने गाँव कनेक्शन को फोन पर बताया, "उन्नाव जिला खुले से शौच मुक्त हो चुका है पर जो परिवार बढ़ रहे हैं उनका सर्वे हो रहा है और उसी हिसाब से शौचालय का निर्माण कराया जा रहा है।" जिले में दलित समुदाय को कितने प्रतिशत शौचालय मिले होंगे? इस पर राजेन्द्र प्रसाद ने कहा, "लगभग 30 से 40% आबादी दलितों की है जिन्हें शौचालय मिला है।"

स्वच्छ भारत मिशन की देख-रेख करने वाले मंत्रालय जलशक्ति मंत्रालय ने वर्ष 2019-20 में एक सर्वे कराया था। NATIONAL ANNUAL RURAL SANITATION SURVEY (NARSS) के इस तीसरे राउंड के सर्वे के मुताबिक भारत को भले ही ओडीएफ घोषित कर दिया गया हो, लेकिन देश भर के 94.4% घरों में ही अभी शौचालय की सुविधा उपलब्ध है। इसमें भी 79.2% लोग ऐसे हैं, जिनका व्यक्तिगत शौचालय है। इसके अलावा 15.2% लोग साझे या सामुदायिक शौचालय का प्रयोग करते हैं।



स्रोत: NATIONAL ANNUAL RURAL SANITATION SURVEY (NARSS) 2019-20

इस रिपोर्ट के अनुसार ओडीएफ घोषित किए गए गांवों में दो फीसदी जबकि ओडीएफ नहीं घोषित किए गए गांवों में 23 फीसदी घरों में शौचालय सुविधा उपलब्ध नहीं है। सर्वे रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, ऐसे परिवार जिनके पास शौचालय तक पहुँच की सुविधा नहीं उपलब्ध है, उसमें सबसे अधिक संख्या आर्थिक व सामाजिक रूप से पिछड़े दलित (अनूसूचित जाति) के लोगों की है। सामान्य के 97 फीसदी के मुकाबले सिर्फ 91.9% दलित परिवारों में ही अब तक शौचालय बन पाया है।

Figure: 9. Accessibility to the toilets among different social groups (%)

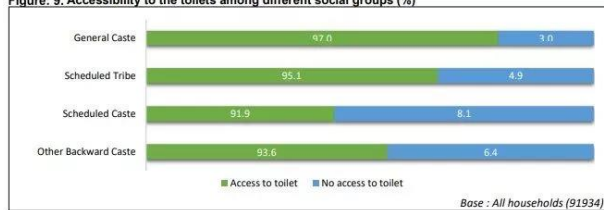


Table: 8. Accessibility of the toilets by socio-economic characteristics

Accessibility of toilets		Total		ODF		Non-ODF	
Toilet access by social category							
Base: All households		Base	%	Base	%	Base	%
Other Backward Caste		32234	93.6	25930	98.0	6304	75.4
Scheduled Caste		19864	91.9	16278	97.3	3586	67.4
Scheduled Tribe		11274	95.1	9550	97.1	1724	84.1
General Caste		26313	97.0	22745	98.9	3568	85.0
Don't Know/Can't Say		2249	94.7	1709	98.3	540	83.4
Total		91934	94.4	76212	98.0	15722	77.0

सोर्स- NATIONAL ANNUAL RURAL SANITATION SURVEY (NARSS) 2019-20

स्वच्छ भारत मिशन की मौजूदा स्थिति

स्वच्छ भारत मिशन की शुरुआत 2 अक्टूबर 2014 को की गई थी, 2 अक्टूबर 2019 को प्रधानमंत्री द्वारा यह घोषणा की गयी कि पूरा देश खुले से शौच मुक्त हो चुका है।

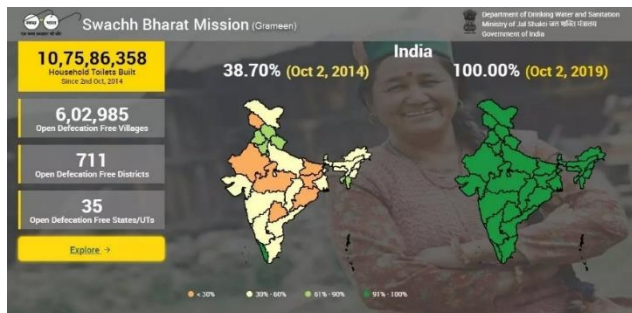
स्वच्छ भारत मिशन ग्रामीण (SBM-G) की वेबसाइट के अनुसार भारत के सभी राज्यों ने अपने आप को खुले में शौच मुक्त (ODF) घोषित कर लिया है। सरकारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार 2014 से पहले तक भारत की 55 करोड़ से अधिक ग्रामीण आबादी खुले में शौच के लिए जाती थी क्योंकि सिर्फ 39% आबादी के पास ही शौचालय था। लेकिन 2 अक्टूबर, 2014 से स्वच्छ भारत अभियान शुरू होने के बाद भारत (ग्रामीण) में अब तक 10 करोड़ 75 लाख 80 हजार से अधिक शौचालय बन चुके हैं और कुल शौचालयों की संख्या 16 करोड़ 42 लाख 72 हजार से अधिक हो गई है।

एसबीएम-जी की वेबसाइट के अनुसार भारत के सभी बिहार (99.56%), पंजाब (99.77%), महाराष्ट्र (99.94%), मणिपुर (99.97%) और तमिलनाडु (99.98%) को छोड़कर बाकी सभी राज्यों में 100% लोगों के पास अपने व्यक्तिगत शौचालय हैं। भारत के 6 लाख 28 हजार 221 गांवों में से 6 लाख 2 हजार 985 गांवों को ओडीएफ घोषित कर उसमें से 5 लाख 99 हजार 793 गांवों को सरकारी रूप से सत्यापित भी किया जा चुका है।

जमीनी सच्चाई?

एसबीएम-जी की वेबसाइट के अनुसार जिस आधार पर अलग-अलग जिलों, राज्यों और फिर पूरे देश को ओडीएफ घोषित किया गया, वह 2012 के बेस लाइन सर्वे के हिसाब से था। 2012 में जितने

घरों में शौचालय नहीं था, उसी सर्वे के आधार पर शौचालयों का निर्माण कर पूरे देश को खुले में शौचमुक्त करने का लक्ष्य रखा गया था।



सोर्स- स्वच्छ भारत मंत्रालय (ग्रामीण) वेबसाइट

हालांकि 2012 के बाद भारत की जनसंख्या 1 अरब 26 करोड़ था, जो कि अब बढ़कर 1 अरब 39 करोड़ हुआ है। जनसंख्या की इस बढ़ोतरी के साथ ही परिवारों और घरों की संख्या भी बढ़ी है। सरकार ने ऐसे बढ़े हुए घरों का जिला स्तर पर सर्वे कराकर उनमें शौचालय बनवाने की प्रक्रिया को चालू रखा है, जिसे ओडीएफ प्लस मिशन कहा जाता है।

2 अक्टूबर, 2018 को उत्तर प्रदेश ने अपने आप को खुले में शौच मुक्त घोषित कर लिया, जबकि एक साल बाद अक्टूबर, 2019 में जब केंद्र के स्वच्छ भारत मिशन मंत्रालय की टीम ने जब प्रदेश का सर्वे किया तो पाया कि राज्य के 14 लाख 62 हजार घरों में अभी भी शौचालय सुविधा नहीं थी।

यह 14 लाख 62 हजार घरों का आंकड़ा तब मिला, जब प्रदेश में 2012 के बेसलाइन सर्वे के अलावा 44 लाख अतिरिक्त घरों में शौचालय बनवाए गए थे। वैसे यह मामला सिर्फ उत्तर प्रदेश का नहीं बल्कि भारत के लगभग सभी राज्यों का है।

जुलाई से दिसंबर, 2018 के बीच भारत सरकार के सांख्यिकी मंत्रालय ने भारत में पेयजल, स्वच्छता, आरोग्यता एवं आवासीय स्थिति के बारे में एक नेशनल सैपल सर्वे (NSS) किया था। इस सरकारी सर्वे में बताया गया कि भारत के 71.3% ग्रामीण परिवारों में ही शौचालय की सुविधा है। उस दौरान स्वच्छ भारत मिशन की वेबसाइट का दावा था कि भारत में 95% से अधिक घरों में शौचालय बन गए हैं।

तब सरकारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार सिर्फ 10 राज्यों उत्तर प्रदेश, बिहार, कर्नाटक, झारखंड, असम, पश्चिम बंगाल, तेलंगाना, त्रिपुरा, गोवा, बिहार और ओडिशा को छोड़कर देश के बाकी सभी राज्यों और केंद्रशासित प्रदेशों को ओडीएफ घोषित कर दिया गया था। इसमें से भी आधे राज्य उत्तर प्रदेश (99.63%), कर्नाटक (98.67%), झारखंड (97.87%), असम (96.38%) और पश्चिम बंगाल

(96.01%) ओडीएफ स्टेट्स के काफी करीब थे और आगे आने वाले कुछ महीनों में इन राज्यों ने अपने आप को ओडीएफ घोषित कर दिया था।

Summary of Findings

Access to latrine	all-India		
	Rural	Urban	All
Exclusive use of the household	63.2	77.6	68.1
Common use of households in the building	7.3	15.6	10.1
Public/Community use without payment	0.2	1.5	0.7
Public/Community use with payment	0.0	1.2	0.4
Other type of access	0.5	0.4	0.5
Households having access to latrine	71.3	96.2	79.8
No latrine (households without having access to latrine)	28.7	3.8	20.2
All	100	100	100

Note 1: Figure 0.0 indicates negligible percentage of households corresponding to particular type of access to latrine.

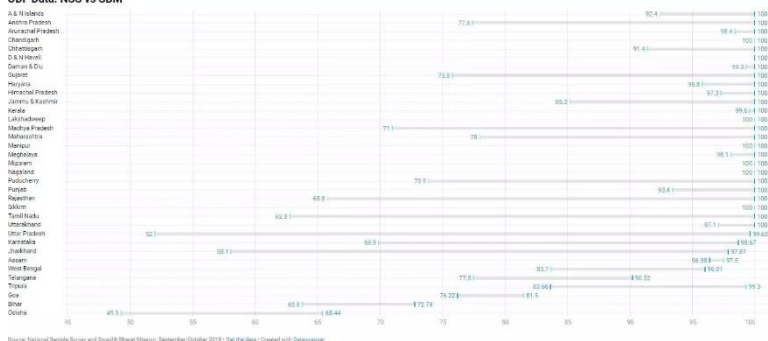
Note 2: The results are to be used considering the explanation given in Section 1.4.2 and 1.4.2.1 regarding possible respondent bias.

Note 1: Figure 0.0 indicates negligible percentage of households corresponding to particular type of access to latrine.
Note 2: The results are to be used considering the explanation given in Section 1.4.2 and 1.4.2.1 regarding possible respondent bias.

पेयजल, स्वच्छता, आरोग्यता एवं आवासीय स्थिति, नेशनल सैंपल सर्वे, 2018

वहीं NSS का डाटा कहता है कि उनके सर्वे में सिर्फ चंडीगढ़, दादरा एवं नागर हवेली और लक्षद्वीप जैसे छोटे केंद्र शासित प्रदेश और मणिपुर, मिजोरम, नागालैंड और सिक्किम जैसे पूर्वोत्तर छोटे राज्य ही 100% ओडीएफ मिले। जहां स्वच्छ भारत मिशन द्वारा कहा गया कि उत्तर प्रदेश में अक्टूबर, 2018 तक 99.63% घरों में शौचालय की सुविधा है, वहीं NSS का डाटा कहता है कि उत्तर प्रदेश में सिर्फ 52% घरों में ही शौचालय उपलब्ध था।

ODF Data: NSS vs SBM



पेयजल, स्वच्छता, आरोग्यता एवं आवासीय स्थिति, नेशनल सैंपल सर्वे, 2018

ठीक इसी तरह का हाल गुजरात, महाराष्ट्र, राजस्थान, मध्य प्रदेश और तमिलनाडु जैसे बड़े राज्यों का था जिसे स्वच्छ भारत मिशन के तहत तो ओडीएफ घोषित कर दिया गया था लेकिन NSS का डाटा कहता है कि इन राज्यों में क्रमशः 75.8%, 78%, 65.8%, 71 और 62.8% घरों में ही शौचालय थे।

बबुरहा गांव में जिन दो लड़कियों की जान गई, वो बेहद गरीब परिवारों की थीं। एक लड़की के परिवार को सरकारी आवास के तहत एक कमरा तो बना है पर उसके बगल का हिस्सा जर्जर अवस्था में है जो तेज बारिश में कभी भी गिर सकता है।

दूसरी वो लड़की जिसके जन्म के 12 दिन बाद ही उसकी माँ की मौत हो गई थी, बाबा-दादी ने मजदूरी करके पाला था। उनके पास भी घर के नाम पर एक मिट्टी का कमरा और उसके बाहर कॉली पॉलीथीन का छप्पर है। घर से कुछ हाथ की दूरी पर पुरानी साड़ियों से घेरकर थोड़ी आड़ की गई है, जहां वो नहाती थी। बाबा को शौचालय नहीं मिला, हालांकि बच्ची के पिता के नाम शौचालय मिला है जिन्होंने पहली पत्नी के देहांत के बाद दूसरी शादी कर ली थी जो अभी अलग रहते हैं। इस शौचालय का इस्तेमाल मृतका बच्ची नहीं कर पाती थी।



एक अन्य मृतका का घर, जहां शौचालय का उपयोग नहाने के लिए होता है। (फोटो- नीतू सिंह)

मृतका की सौतेली माँ ने बताया, "हमारे यहाँ शौचालय तो बना है पर हम उसका उपयोग नहाने के लिए करते हैं, कभी-कभी मेरी बिटिया भी इसमें नहा लेती थी। घर में नहाने की कोई बंद जगह नहीं है इसलिए मजबूरी में इसी में नहाते हैं, बाकी शौच के लिए खेत में चले जाते हैं।"

वहीं दूसरी मृतका की भाभी जिनके घर में साड़ियों से आड़ की जगह बनी हुई है उन्होंने बताया, "शौचालय बनने के लिए प्रधान से कई बार कहा पर उन्होंने कहा जब आ जाएंगे तब दे देंगे। रात में खुले घर में ऐसे आड़ की जगह में जब पेशाब करने जाते हैं तो डर लगता है पर क्या कर सकते हैं?"

सड़क किनारे हमारा घर है कोई भी कूद सकता है, सयानी लड़कियाँ घर में हैं पर मजबूरी है। हमारे पास अभी इतना इंतजाम नहीं है कि हम खुद से शौचालय बनवा सकें।"

एक लड़की के घर शौचालय नहीं होने के बारे में पूछने पर ग्राम प्रधान ने जवाब दिया, "मुझे इसकी जानकारी नहीं है कि उनके यहाँ शौचालय नहीं है। जितने की मांग आती है उतने की हम डिमांड बनाकर भेजते हैं, जितने स्वीकृत होते हैं उन्हें शौचालय दे दिया जाता है। पिछले एक डेढ़ साल में 500-550 शौचालय हमने बनवाये हैं।

Daya Sagar is a multimedia Journalist currently working with ESPNcrinfo. Before moving to sports he was with Gaon Connection where he worked on a number of stories on Education, Environment, Rural and Gender issues. In 2020, he was awarded a UNFPA Laadli Award.



Neetu Singh is an independent journalist and the founder of 'Shades of Rural India'. She is keenly sensitive towards issues of women empowerment, sexual and gender based violence, and tribal issues. Her reporting of cases of gender based violence in rural India has led to effective police action and justice for survivors and in 11 years, Neetu won Laadli Media and Advertising award 8 times for Gender Sensitive reporting. She has also won Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Women Media persons and Priyanka Dahele Award for a young promising Journalist in 2020.



<https://www.gaonconnection.com/read/odf-is-still-a-not-reality-on-ground-in-india-recent-unnao-case-has-a-relation-with-odf-48790>

Insensitive and Apathetic

India has one of the most progressive laws and policies when it comes to women's rights, yet women continue to be denied justice, services and support systems.

Highlighting the inherent patriarchy in the judicial system while interpreting women's rights, Shalini Nair in **'Call it what it is: Rape'** analyses the role of the Supreme Court, one of the foremost institutions upholding democracy, in ensuring justice in the matter of marital rape. In the context of how recent judgements continue to silence those violated, the piece examines the myth of stranger rape and its patriarchal origins.

Along similar lines, the excessive emphasis of the government on population control has resulted in undermining the reproductive rights of women in the country. Aatreyee Dhar's, **'Climate shocked women in India targeted under a new two-child policy'** highlights the vulnerability, anxieties, and challenges of Assam's char-dwelling population as it finds itself at risk of losing critical government assistance after massive flooding ravaged the state last year. With the state-government planning to enforce a new law with families having over two children losing access to state-run programs, women from these villages find themselves cornered, as it was the floods itself, which prevented them from accessing contraceptives. The article examines the various nuances of their situation and gives a voice to those otherwise voiceless.

The apathy and insensitivity of programme managers and government servants are further brought to light by Jyoti Yadav and Jayali Wavhal. **'She was 8 months pregnant, was forced' into UP poll duty that killed '135 teachers'** by Jyoti Yadav is an investigative piece focused on the apathy of the state machinery that threatened the job security of a young expectant mother, forcing her to attend poll duty, that eventually led to her death due to allegedly contracting covid. Set in this context, Jyoti further examines the political aftermath on one hand, and the grieving family and their loss on the other hand.

Jayali Wavhal's **'20km on feet for basic healthcare: Story of Bhamragarh's pregnant women'** is an insightful piece detailing the healthcare infrastructure in Bhamragarh where the nearest health centre is over 20 km away, on terrains that are not motorable on even two-wheelers and involve traversing two mountains. The article sheds light on the challenges these women face and overcome, and how little has changed despite the loss of life due to the lack of these basic resources.

Homeless women do not generally figure in media reporting and hardly get the attention of the government or women's welfare departments. Left to fend for themselves they live a precarious life. **'No shelter for homeless women for whom each day is fraught with risks'** by Nitasha Natu and Mohua Das is set in the metropolis of Mumbai and centres on the trauma, abuse, and violence faced by homeless women, with little to no respite. It chronicles these women as they find themselves in a constant state of threat- preparedness.

At the same time, examining the massively unprepared infrastructure and insufficient resources deployed to help these women escape the situation they find themselves trapped in.

Often the impact of development and infrastructure programmes on the lives of women is far from positive, with them being the collateral for the country's development. **'Dams displaced and changed women's lives in Gujarat'** by Vaishnavi Rathore is a good example of a development story written from a gender perspective. She chronicles the lives of the villagers in Southern Gujarat's Tapi district, as they find themselves deprived of their land, and their children deprived of schools. The sad irony was in the fact that it was the very project that they worked on, the building of the Karajan Dam that ensured that their entire village went under the storage reservoir. What's more, women are doubly impacted, as they are forced to farm on two separate lands and also manage the household.

Similarly, migrant women are the invisible workforce with a majority of women migrating for marriage, while the percentage of solo women migrating to work is pegged at around 3%. Women who migrate with families and take up part-time jobs to support the family are often not recognized as migrant workers which was amply demonstrated during the reverse migration during the covid lockdown. **'Migrant women find moving up is still hard'** by Shikha Sharma is a hard-hitting data-driven analysis of the disparity between women and men when it comes to employment opportunities, earning potential, and overall improvements in quality of life as migrants. Furthermore, it examines the reasons behind female migration, and how this untapped demographic dividend is for a large part being underutilized and offers remedial measures to improve the situation.

Yet another issue that remains unaddressed in spite of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is the need for public toilets by women who are working or using public spaces or travelling on highways. The apathy and lack of concern to provide safe and clean public toilets for women is highlighted by Elisa Patnaik's, **'Our never-ending quest for a clean and safe public toilet'**. It is a call to action for all those who seek to champion women's rights to demand clean and safe public toilets. The article details the challenges and harm caused by its lack, and how while things may have improved leaps and bounds when it comes to access to certain utilities, access to clean and safe public toilets still remains woefully behind.

Drawing attention to the Dalit women who are forever exploited and neglected by the government schemes and programmes, Venkatesh Karusala in **'Even subsistence food has turned out to be unaffordable (Translated from Telugu)'** explores how the pandemic has threatened the very survival of one of the most disenfranchised communities, the Dalits. And, how women from these communities have come together in an inspiring manner to create an organization of 10,000+ cadres called the Dalit Shree Shakti to assert their rights, increase awareness of their rights and democratic processes, and in the process uplift their communities.

Lastly, with ‘निर्भया केस के बाद अब तक लापरवाही बरतने वाले कितने पुलिस अधिकारियों के खिलाफ दर्ज हुई एफआईआर?’, Neetu Singh asks a critical question for every society – how are the upholders of justice judged, when they fail to ensure justice for those that need it the most. As she, in her article, chronicles the action, rather the inaction, taken towards police officers, against whom negligence has been claimed, in some of the most gruesome crimes against women across the nation.

19. Call it what it is: Rape

Shalini Nair | The Indian Express | March 12th, 2021

The Supreme Court's statements in two recent cases invisibilise sexual violence in the institutions of family and marriage.

Two separate cases on a single day saw the Supreme Court play the patriarch who upholds the institution of marriage and family at all costs. Both hearings, held on March 1, compel us to scrutinise these institutions whose inviolability subsists on the state enforcing the silence of those violated.

In the first case, the bench, headed by Chief Justice of India S A Bobde, asked the accused whether he would marry the teenage girl, a relative, whom he was not only accused of raping when she was a minor but also stalking and threatening. The CJJ clarified on March 8 that the bench didn't order him to 'marry', only asked him if he would. The apex court added, *"We do not remember any case of marital rape was before us ... We have the highest respect for women."* In the second instance, the SC bench wondered, rhetorically, whether a man, no matter how brutal he is, could be accused of rape in a live-in relationship.

Despite the disclaimer, the statements made by the top court delegitimise the lived experience of rape within the institutions of marriage and family. The bench has also given a generous interpretation of the exception to rape laws in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 375 — which states that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife cannot be termed as rape — by extending the protection to men in live-in relationships. The remarks are premised on the view of rape as a stigma and not as a violation of bodily autonomy, and of marriage as a restoration of so-called lost honour, never mind that it will reproduce the violation every day.

This view is bolstered by the popular perception of the rapist as the stranger in the dark alley. Of the 32,033 rapes registered in 2019 under IPC section 376, as per the National Crime Records Bureau, less than six per cent — 1,868 — were by strangers. In 94 per cent of the cases, the accused were known to the survivors and included family members, friends, neighbours, live-in partners, and separated husbands. There is no data on husbands who are offenders as the law dismisses the very possibility of sexual violence within marriage.

A World Health Organisation report released this week states that intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most prevalent form of violence against women. While six per cent of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) have been sexually assaulted by someone other than an intimate partner, 27 per cent have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. In India, as per WHO data, the proportion of IPV is 35 per cent.

This is not to argue for expanding the ambit of criminalisation but to re-examine demands for tougher sentencing and the death penalty. These demands, premised on the myth of stranger rape prevalence, don't consider what the survivor wants by way of restitution. Notwithstanding the exception granted to husbands under the rape laws, survivors of marital rape have recourse to justice, monetary relief, and shelter under the expansive civil Domestic Violence Act, which recognises the simultaneity of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. However, the two recent cases reveal our continued refusal to see family and intimate relations as the primary sites of gendered violence.

"What may appear to be marital rape (to a wife) may not appear so to others," said the Centre in its September 2017 affidavit before the Supreme Court. When it comes to family honour, appearances are more important. This has implications for how the justice system treats survivors of sexual violence. Forced marriages are a common subterfuge for trafficking vulnerable tribal women from rural India as the traffickers know that a man will never be considered responsible for sexually exploiting his wife. Despite being banned by the SC in 2013, the two-finger test is still used on rape survivors. It is based on the notion that an intact hymen is the mark of an unmarried woman's honour and rape could only be committed against a woman whose hymen — and by extension honour — is still intact. The presumption is that married women can't be raped, especially not by their own. Similarly, the focus during rape trials on signs of resistance on the survivor's body and clothes overlooks the fact that, often, survivors simply freeze, especially when the perpetrator is a known person or someone high in the power hierarchy.

Almost 50 years ago, the SC's dismissal of the Mathura rape case, because there were no signs of struggle, overlooked the power differentials in an Adivasi girl's rape and assault by cops in a police station. The outrage that followed wrote custodial rape into India's criminal law. Historian Uma Chakravarti has since argued that violence that occurs within the 'protective custody' of the institution of family is also a form of custodial violence.

Like the recent open letter to the CJI signed by thousands of activists, there was one addressed to the Supreme Court in the wake of the Mathura case. It read, *"Consent involves submission, but the converse is not necessarily true. Nor is absence of resistance necessarily indicative of consent"*. When the top court of the country uses the word 'seduction' while referring to sexual violence and hesitates to use the term 'rape' only because the survivor and the accused lived as husband and wife, consent takes on a more retrograde redefinition — as not merely submission, but servitude.

Shalini Nair is an independent journalist and a PhD researcher at the University of Sussex, UK, where she is examining the many aspects of sexual violence in India. She has been in charge of reporting on India's social sector policies for the National Bureau of The Indian Express and she presently contributes op-eds on issues of gender and social justice. She also serves as a Trustee with the Survivors' Network, the Rape Crisis Centre in Sussex (UK).

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/supreme-court-rape-cases-india-women-safety-s-a-bobde-7224377/>



20. Even subsistence food has turned out to be unaffordable (Telugu)

Venkatesh Karusala | Andhra Jyothi | June 14th, 2021

“To the deprived sections of the populace, it was hunger which became a more threatening curse than Covid. The high cost of essential commodities has turned into death pangs for the poor during Covid” – observes Jhansi Geddani, National Convener of Dalit Stree Sakthi. She points out that Dalits were discriminated against even in the isolation shelters. She shared with Navya, her opinions about the desperate and pathetic situation of Dalits and their problems during Covid.

Covid has affected one and all, but the poor and middle class paid a much higher cost. The second wave of Covid descended on the low-income groups like a meteor with a nearly cataclysmic impact that is extremely difficult to quantify. Without employment opportunities, people have been unable to make ends meet, with little to no differences between the situation in urban centres and the rural countryside.

Dalit Stree Sakthi has been working in the villages of Andhra and Telangana covering 10 districts and has been witness to an abysmal and poignant situation of the poor in the villages. During the lockdown, the people have been left to starve, with the Government turning a blind eye to people’s misery.

Lack of Nutritious Food

During the lockdown the poor were forced to stay back at home. With no work under the rural employment scheme in A.P., and money not disbursed for the work done in Telangana. Consequently, the poor starved during the lockdown period. Many of them, due to their inherent immunity recovered from Covid but were still suffering due to weakness as they were unable to afford nutritious food.

On the other hand, the prices of essential commodities were continually on the rise. In such a scenario, for the labourers who eke out a living with one or two hundred rupees daily, the question of purchasing oils and pulses doesn’t arise. Even the lowest subsistence foods like rice with chilli powder are also out of reach for them. The situation is so grim that it is hunger that may kill more people than Covid.

Despite this, the governments are not paying any attention. They say ‘we are giving rice through ration shops’, but is it enough? It’s alarming if an alternative plan of action to prevent starvation deaths is not thought over. Considering the lack of proper medical facilities in villages, with long queues of people who are forced to wait for hours to get Covid vaccines or medicines. Many incidents of people falling due to exhaustion have

already occurred. All these incidents make one wonder if this is what we achieved in the aftermath of 74 years of independence.

Broader Outlook

Dalit Stree Sakthi (DSS) was established in 2005 with the broader objective of empowering Dalit women in social, economic and political spheres and achieving an equitable share of Dalit women in all spheres. DSS is working for the protection of the rights of Dalit women in districts of Guntur, Krishna, West Godavari, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Ranga Reddy, Hyderabad, Medchal, Vikarabad, Adilabad. As part of its empowerment strategy, they have been educating the Dalit women on the SC, ST (PoA) Act and fighting against all forms of atrocities. So far, they have addressed about 10 thousand cases of various forms of atrocities. During the Covid times, it also brought to the attention of the concerned authorities, 50 cases of atrocities through online interaction and secured compensation to the victims. Cheating the girls in the name of love, sexual exploitation, etc. are the chief concerns that they have been trying to access justice for. In both the Telugu states DSS has about 10 thousand cadres. They conduct classes for the rural youth on social issues and laws, thereby spreading democratic awareness among them. Mass organisations, and civil rights organisations should work above caste, religious and other parochial feelings, only then can there be the eradication of narrow and sectarian prejudices among the people.

Hideous Marriages in Secrecy

Child rights were neglected during the Covid period. Children lost their education. With an atmosphere conducive to children's mental growth missing, there were few concerned about children's education or health. Pre-lockdown children at least had mid-day meals, even of low quality with watery dal and an egg. Now they were deprived of even this. A large number of children who could not afford a smartphone, had no option but to miss online classes. Even if some children could force their parents to purchase a smartphone it was observed that they were spending inordinate amounts of time on the internet. What's worse, the covid situation was taken advantage of by some, by stealthily marrying their children. Fortunately, DSS was able to stall at least 10 child marriages recently. During the lockdown period, however, many petty traders were pauperised with child marriages taking place in such families.

Escalation of Domestic Violence

There has been a noticeable rise in domestic violence compared to normal times. Drunken husbands battering their wives or beating them for money for purchasing liquor has increased during the Covid period. Sexual assaults on girls also increased. In one of the places where DSS operates, a diehard sexist man raped an 11-year-old girl who is considered to be his daughter. He threatened to kill the girl if she told anyone. Once the incident came to notice DSS took immediate steps to see that he is arrested and booked

under POCSO. Though they could get the culprit arrested in this case, so far, the government didn't provide the girl rehabilitation and other benefits and they are still trying to get these sanctioned. In another instance, a non-Dalit boy loved a Dalit girl and took her to his home. His parents and relatives tortured the girl. They locked her in a room and suffocated her in pungent smoke by burning dry red chillies. She somehow escaped their captivity and approached DSS. Likewise, DSS approached the police in a few more cases.

In some isolation centres for Covid patients, the so-called upper castes are protesting to stay with Dalits. Even the backward castes also are following the same attitude and refuse to stay alongside the Dalits. This shows that in the country, the caste devil is more dangerous than Covid.

Confusion in Andhra

Not filing proper cases under proper sections of law has been the usual tendency of the police during normal times. In times of Covid, it has been perceived as a chance to escape altogether from this responsibility. Whenever we ask the police about the cases they respond, 'what madam! What can we do now in times of Corona? In a village in Ranga Reddy district, 8 acres of a Dalit farmer's land has been occupied by dominant castes and they have even appropriated the standing crop on the land. We brought this issue to the notice of the higher authorities in the police department. Still, there is no response or suitable action. In Andhra, there is still a lot of confusion prevailing there about the SC/ST (PoA) Act. The government itself is diluting the effectiveness of the Act. It is agonising to see the Act which is intended to be the weapon in the hands of the Dalits to protect their rights being politicised.

Venkatesh Karusala is a programme associate at ETV2 in Hyderabad since the past 8 years. He has written multiple interviews and is a M.A in Telugu from Potti Sriramulu Telugu University.



21. She was 8 months pregnant, was ‘forced’ into UP poll duty that killed ‘135 teachers’

Jyoti Yadav | www.theprint.in | April 30th, 2021



Among the UP teachers who died after poll duty was an 8 months pregnant woman. RSS-affiliated Rashtriya Saikishik Mahasangh has decided to boycott counting duty on 2 May.

Jaunpur/Ballia: Kalyani Agrahari, 27, an assistant teacher in the first month of her job, did not want to do the panchayat election duty on 15 April. She was eight months pregnant and it would not have been easy for her to sit in one place for so long.

On 9 April, accompanied by her husband, Kalyani travelled 30 kilometres from Pataila gram panchayat to Jaunpur Vikas Bhavan to submit an application saying she would not be able to report on election duty.

"I am a primary school teacher posted at Moina Composite School in Khutahan block. I am assigned at the Panchyat Polls and my code number is 24146. Due to my critical pregnancy, I will not be able to come on duty. Therefore, it is my humble request to the district election officer to relieve me from my duty," her application, accessed by ThePrint, read.

The trip, however, proved to be futile. She was allegedly told that she would face an FIR, and also lose her salary if she did not report to duty.

Fifteen days later, the teacher died in a Jaunpur hospital. Her death certificate said she was Covid-positive, according to her family. Kalyani is one of the '135 teachers' who have died so far after having been deployed on poll duty in Uttar Pradesh, according to the Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh, an association of teachers affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS).

While there is no official record of this, the family members of the teachers ThePrint spoke to said they all had Covid or showed symptoms of the infection.

Thursday was the last day of the four-phase panchayat elections, the results of which will be announced on 2 May. Taking cognisance of these deaths, the Allahabad High Court issued a show-cause notice to the Uttar Pradesh State Commission on 27 April, asking why action should not be taken against it and officials for not enforcing Covid protocols.

However, the Yogi Adityanath government has said in a statement that it did not want to hold the panchayat elections but it was an Allahabad High Court order that forced it to conduct it before 30 April.

Reached for comment, Nitish Singh, SDM Sadar, Jaunpur, told ThePrint, *"If someone is unwell, the person has to write to our medical committee. To relieve that person on medical grounds is a decision taken by that committee. This incident (of Agrahari) is unfortunate, I will see if I can help the family in any way."*

The Print also reached Education Minister Satish Chandra Dwivedi through phone calls and text messages for a comment but there was no response till the publication of this report.

The Rashtriya Shaikshik Mahasangh has, meanwhile, decided to boycott the counting duty on 2 May.

The UP Pradeshiya Prathamik Shiksha Sangh also said teachers want to boycott the counting duty. In a statement issued Thursday, the association released a list of 706 teachers who it claimed have died of Covid so far since the beginning of the pandemic. The statement addressed to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the state election commissioner also requested that the counting be put on hold for now. Making a similar demand, the UP Shikshak Mahasangh is learnt to have released a list of "577 teachers and support staff" who died after having been deployed on panchayat poll duty.

'She was pregnant, they could have sent me instead'

Kalyani was one of the 69,000 assistant teachers who were recruited in January 2021. This was her first posting, and she died even before she could get her first salary.

The job was long awaited as the matter of their appointment had been in court. *"She was having anxieties that she would not be able to sit for a long time on poll duty. I*

accompanied her to the Vikas Bhavan but we were told that an FIR would be registered if she refused to come on duty. We both came home disheartened. *Unhone kaha nayi naukri hai, salary nahin milegi (they said it's a new job, you won't get salary),*” Deepak, Kalyani’s husband, told ThePrint.

“She was forced to travel 32 kilometres to reach the polling station on 15 April. She spent more than 12 hours on the field. She had been feeling unwell since she came back home. After two days of fever, her condition started worsening,” Deepak added.

Kalyani also had to go to the polling station on 14 April, a day before the polls, for training, said her husband.

The 27-year-old died on 24 April at a Mahila Chikitsaalay (women’s hospital), two days before their third wedding anniversary, which was on 26 April. Agrahari’s death certificate issued by the hospital said she was Covid positive and died of cardiopulmonary arrest during treatment.

Deepak showed the last photos of his wife, lying in a semi-conscious state with oxygen support.

“She kept saying, ‘save me please’. Maine doctors ke pair pakde, gid-gidaye, par wo nahin rahi (I pleaded with the doctors to save her, but she didn’t survive). Around 11.30 am, the doctor finally came and told us that she is no more. The officials killed her. They all should be booked for criminal negligence,” Deepak said in a choked voice, adding how difficult it is for him now to come to terms with the loss of his unborn child and wife.

A few kilometres away from Deepak’s home lives Kalyani’s family — also angry, devastated and feeling ‘cheated’. Her 52-year-old father Suresh Kumar broke down as he spoke to ThePrint over the phone, *“When they knew that she is eight-month pregnant, they could have sent me to poll duty instead of her.”*

“Maine usey itna padhaya likhaya ki kuch banegi, lekin system se kya mila? Ek maut. Meri beti ki jaan panchayat vibhag ke adhikariyon ki wajah se gayi (I sent her to school and college so she could do well in life. But this system only gave us death. My daughter died because of the officials at panchayats department),” he said.

Recalling the days since Kalyani returned from her poll duty on 15 April, the family said she had a fever and they decided to take her to the hospital on 18 April after her temperature did not come down after two days.

“We approached the Akbarpur district hospital first but were turned away. We then went to Isha hospital in Jaunpur, JP Dubey hospital in Shahganj, Kumar Hospital in Jalalpur, Ambedkarnagar, Mayo Hospital in Jalalpur, Sunita Hospital in Jaunpur, Trauma Center in Jaunpur and Sadar Hospital in Jaunpur one by one, but there was no bed anywhere. We

ran from pillar to post for three days. Precious time was lost... After her oxygen level dropped to 40, we went for a Covid test and also arranged an oxygen cylinder,” said the father.

‘Aana toh padega, nahin toh FIR’

Ballia district, around 170 km from Jaunpur, also witnessed similar deaths. The district went to polls in the third phase on 26 April. According to the district teachers’ association, over 10 teachers have died ‘mysterious deaths’

Nirbhay Singh, a member of the association, told ThePrint, *“Many had symptoms so they went to block officials to get their duties cancelled but they were threatened with FIRs and voluntary retirement.”*

Sapna Gupta, 56, who had taught science as a Basic Shiksha Adhikari for years, was to retire in a few years.

“She went to her allotted polling station on 15 April for training. After returning, she started developing a cough, nausea, and other symptoms. She went to the district officials along with other teachers with a request to have herself removed from poll duty but was told that she would be forced to take voluntary retirement. Her last days were in extreme pain as her health started deteriorating,” said her daughter Swati Gupta. Sapna’s CT scan report showed signs of Covid-19, she said.

“The doctor said she is Covid positive. I got her admitted to Basantpur L2 Covid centre where she was kept for three days. I took her to a Mau hospital for further treatment as her health deteriorated, but she died there within hours,” Swati told ThePrint. Sapna died a day before she was to do her poll duty. *“If she had not gone that day for her training at the polling station, she would not get infected with the virus,”* said the daughter.

Santosh Mourya, Pradesh Sanyukt Mahamantri of the Rashtriya Saikishik Mahasangh, told ThePrint: *“We protested in Lakhimpur district. 2,000 teachers have decided to boycott counting duty on 2 May. 33 teachers have died in our own district.”* He added, *“Their families are also infected. No help is provided to the families. No bed is being given to the ailing teachers.”*

As of 28 April, UP had 3,00,082 active Covid cases, and the state has recorded 11,943 deaths since the pandemic struck. According to official figures, the state has reported 266 Covid deaths in the last 24 hours.

Jyoti Yadav has been reporting for the past 6 years on unemployment, gender crimes, human rights, politics, and policy. Her approach encompasses both an urban and rural lens with investigative stories on gender, health, poverty, policies and politics. Including on-ground reports on the plight of migrants walking home, quarantine centres, deliveries on highways, migrants who died in road accidents, and more.

<https://theprint.in/india/she-was-8-months-pregnant-was-forced-into-up-poll-duty-that-killed-135-teachers/648092/>



22. No shelter for homeless women for whom each day is fraught with risks

Nitasha Natu, Mohua Das | Times of India | September 19th, 2021



Mumbai's homeless women live on pavements, railway platforms ..

On a footpath near JJ Hospital, Kanchan* strains her ears to hear the chugging of the day's first local train. It's 4 am and people around have started to stir—a sign for Kanchan to get some sleep with her children behind a blue tarpaulin sheet they call home.

A widow, Kanchan has been on self-imposed guard duty every night both her daughters turned 16 a few years ago. *"We live close to a public dustbin where drunk men venture at odd hours to relieve themselves. If I don't stay up, my daughter's safety is at risk,"* she said.

The brutal rape and murder of a pavement dweller at Sakinaka have put the spotlight on homeless women in the city. Whether living alone or with a family, every minute on the street after dusk is fraught with danger. *"There have been instances where unknown men linger around till all street dwellers are asleep and then lie down next to a woman,"* said Brijesh Arya of Homeless Collective, an umbrella outfit representing groups working for the homeless. *"Many homeless women do not venture out to public toilets throughout the night out of fear of being stalked or groped,"* he added.

According to the 2011 census, Mumbai has a population of 57,416 homeless people. The same year, a study by the non-profit BUILD covering 300 homeless respondents, showed that women are at a greater disadvantage in all aspects. Around 77% of female respondents had faced abuse compared to 46% of men. The average earning of a woman was as low as Rs 121.

The study also showed that a majority of homeless did not beg for a living and had stayed on the streets for over 20 years.

Apart from seasonal and informal sector workers who do not earn enough for an urban home, Mumbai's homeless women—living on pavements, railway platforms, under flyovers, inside concrete pipes and other open spaces — include many that ran away from home after facing violence from family or by a trafficker. Some are mentally ill and were either abandoned or lost their way. *“We’ve come across instances where women were put on a train by families after they found it difficult to cope with their treatment. That’s why you’ll find a higher number of homeless mentally ill women around railway terminus,”* said Mohammed Tarique, director of Koshish, a TISS project on homelessness.

“These women take to the streets where they are often picked up by the police under the Prevention of Begging Act and sent to a beggars’ home whereas what they need is medical intervention,” said Tarique. When eventually released these women are worse off because they’re back on the streets untreated and more vulnerable to abuse.

One of the reasons why instances of rape or molestation go unreported among homeless women is the *“prejudiced perception”* that it’s their lifestyle. To a layman, what may appear as infidelity is actually life under tremendous duress.

“Often a woman living alone or with a child on the streets finds a man who can provide some security to her. It doesn’t mean they’re in love but that she’s not available for others. The choice is about being abused by the same person repeatedly or by different people on different days,” said Tarique.

When everyday survival is a challenge for a homeless woman — seen as a nuisance by the police and municipal authorities — seeking help from state agencies is not an easy option. Sharda*, who lives on a south Mumbai pavement, has made endless trips to the police station after an undertrial released from jail during the pandemic started living on the same pavement as her and later took off with her young daughter. *“We don’t have a mechanism to proactively provide support to the victim. So, one just waits for crimes to happen for machinery to be activated,”* says Tarique, rueing the inadequacy of shelters.

According to SC guidelines, cities with a population of more than 5 lakh should have homeless shelters for 100 persons and one shelter per one lakh population. Going by this, Mumbai should have at least 125 shelters but presently has only 19. Ujjwal Uke, head of the state-level Shelter Monitoring Committee, said the availability of land is one of the key

issues for shelter construction in Mumbai. *"We have had a meeting with municipal commissioner IS Chahal who has offered to study the model of Rain Basera (night shelters) of Delhi,"* Uke said.

Though the Mumbai Police has introduced 'Nirbhaya Squads' that will intensify patrolling crime hotspots, it may not be enough to resolve the plight of homelessness and help the women recover. *"We need to find a strategic way that civil society, state machinery and police can work together,"* warned Nandita Shah of Akshara Centre.

The movement to bring gender concerns to the city's-built environment has been a long and arduous one since 2013 when women's groups started lobbying for gender inclusion in the planning infrastructure. An entire chapter titled 'Gender, Special Groups and Social Equity' was finally added by BMC to the city's Revised Draft Development Plan (RDDP) 2034 and notified by the state in 2018. *"There's been a big demand for night shelters for women which aren't just government homes where they are locked up but a safe space for them at night,"* said Shah who steered the gender inclusion campaign. *"There's an allocation for it in the RDDP but it needs to be activated."*

*These names have been changed to protect the identity of the speakers.

Nitasha Natu is a Senior Assistant Editor with the Times of India in Mumbai. She is a postgraduate in law from Mumbai University. Over the past 19 years, she has written extensively on gender, human rights, violence against women and children and road safety.



Mohua Das Menon is a Senior Assistant Editor with The Times of India in Mumbai, prior to which she was with The Telegraph, Calcutta. A journalist for 16 years and a Chevening SAJP Fellow, the thrust of Mohua's features span gender, human trafficking, social development, educational reforms, communities, arts & cybersecurity.



<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/no-shelter-for-homeless-women-for-whom-each-day-is-fraught-with-risks/articleshow/86330856.cms>

23. 20km on feet for basic healthcare: Story of Bhamragarh's pregnant women

Jayali Wavhal | www.indiejournal.in | February 7th, 2021



Last year, the stories of the ordeals faced by two pregnant women in Bhamragarh taluka of Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, as they tried to reach the hospital to deliver their babies, shook the state. Roshni Paduli was home when her water broke, and the labour pains had become unbearable. The nearest health centre was 23kms away from her village Turemarka. With no proper roads and transport facilities, the only alternative was to walk to the health centre, which included crossing sewers, rivers, forest areas and uneven terrain. Almost four hours and 14kms later, Roshni reached the primary health centre in Laheri from where she was taken to the Bhamragarh hospital in a vehicle. She gave birth to her baby on the same day.

Three days later, Roshni had to make the same journey back - only this time with her baby. However, around six months after Roshni's ordeal, the situation has not really changed for the women in her village. Bodhi Ramteke, a social worker active in the Bhamragarh area, had visited Roshni and other women and documented their stories earlier in October 2020. According to his team's work, the villages around Bhamragarh taluka have been struggling with basic health facilities and infrastructure for a long time now.

Another woman, a four-month-pregnant Jaya, was working in the fields all day. On returning home, she fell unconscious, causing her family to panic. There was no bridge to cross the river in the village, and owing to heavy rains, the water level had increased significantly. The lack of proper roads implied that the only way to get medical help was to cross the river. Jaya was laid down on a cot and was carried across the overflowing river by her family members. Upon reaching the primary health centre in Laheri, Jaya's family found no doctor available at the moment. They soon took her to the Bhamragarh hospital around eight-nine km away in an ambulance which didn't have any doctor or nurses to provide primary medical help on the way. Upon reaching the Bhamragarh hospital, Jaya was declared dead on arrival.

To this day, the medical authorities have not provided a post-mortem report for Jaya's death, depriving her family of any closure.

For any medical emergency, the villagers have to travel a distance of more than 20kms on foot to reach the nearest primary health centre at Laheri, or the Bhamragarh hospital, which is even further. Pregnant women, especially, have to walk on foot for any emergencies like pregnancy pains, delivery, or routine gynaecology check-ups.

The distance from Turemarka to Laheri is 23kms, with no adequate roads for even a motorbike to pass safely. The path, laden with pebbles and rocks, also required the pregnant woman to cross two mountains before she reached the safety of a hospital.

Deepak Chatap of Path Foundation and his colleagues have escalated this issue with the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), as the right to health and the right to life are the fundamental rights of any citizen. The citizens here are knowingly being deprived of them, Chatap says. The absence of proper infrastructure and transport facilities further emphasises the lack of health services.

"This is a usual practice in the area for pregnant women - walking 25-30kms to reach the hospital, arranging cots to transport them when their water breaks and risking the lives of their babies. We had submitted the records to the SHRC which showed how many pregnant women died due to lack of facilities. There needs to be a change and it needs to be quick," Chatap adds.

Since the Bhamragarh area is largely dominated by Naxals, the state authorities have delayed building health centres for a long time now. They have also cited a lack of funds for not building health centres in the surrounding villages. *"Recently, a mining project was approved by the State Government here. They even deployed police personnel near the mining sites. If Naxals and funding were a problem, then how come the mining project was sanctioned and given full security?"* questions Ramteke.

The nearest primary health centre at Laheri is managed by Asha workers and government doctors who visit regularly. However, they don't have any ambulances or vehicles to travel

to surrounding villages and check up on the patients. Asha workers too are reluctant to visit the pregnant women fearing Naxal presence, they instead request the women to travel to the primary health centres. To this, Ramteke says, *“We understand that they have limitations. It isn’t their fault entirely either, but nor is it ours. All we want are basic facilities so that raising a family doesn’t include risking the lives of our women and their babies, the villagers say.”*

Anytime a pregnant woman needs immediate medical assistance, the villagers immediately gather and set out to carry her to the Laheri primary health centre, which takes about three-four hours. But since there is no proper network coverage in the area, the villagers can’t call the health centre to check if the doctors and nurses are available or not. They hope that medical aid and staff is available.

In his initial report, Gadchiroli District Collector Deepak Singla stated that due to the rains, Roshni Padoli was not provided with an ambulance. However, Ramteke has stated in his account that irrespective of the rains, no ambulance can reach the villages. Instead, it’s the villagers who build a not-so-safe wooden bridge annually for which they don’t receive any compensation from the state either.

The matter has been escalated to the court, where, after Ramteke and Chatap submitted a detailed report about the challenges faced by pregnant women, the court had asked the district collector to submit a response too. According to the updated report, Singla has admitted to the shortcomings of the authorities in not providing basic facilities to the women. Singla has also assured that his administration will take appropriate steps to build the health and transport infrastructure in the villages so that other pregnant women don’t have to go through what Roshni and Jaya did. The next court hearing will be held on March 21 where the fate of the pregnant women in these remote villages will be decided.

Jayali Wavhal has worked as a news correspondent with Indie Journal before working as a sub-editor at Sadhana, scripting editor at Deluxe Media, Content editor at Pepper Content, and senior sub-editor at The Patriot. Her work focuses on civic and social issues, besides covering stories on politics, gender issues, climate change, environment, education, law, agriculture, art, and foreign issues.

<https://www.indiejournal.in/article/20km-on-feet-for-basic-healthcare-story-of-bhamragarh-s-pregnant-women>



24. Dams displaced and changed women's lives in Gujarat

Vaishnavi Rathore | www.behanbox.com | July 21st, 2021



Raju Ben Vasava in her rehabilitated home in Kandbudi, Tapi district, Gujarat. All Photos/ Vaishnavi Rathore

New Delhi: If it were not for the pandemic, Raju Ben Vasava's grandchildren would be at school. But schools are shut, and Raju Ben, 55, is babysitting for the day. The children are a talkative bunch, taking time off only to munch on their freshly-picked pink guavas.

This is Kandbudi, a village in Southern Gujarat's Tapi district, and here, children did have easy access to schools before the pandemic hit. But in Bej, 40 km away, where Vasava lived till 40 years ago with her husband, his parents and two children, school was a perilous journey away.

"In Bej, rivers would flow so violently during monsoons that our children could not cross them to go to school the entire season," recalls Vasava.

Bej sat in the fertile land where the river Karjan, a tributary of Narmada, forked into two. Today, Vasava's old home lies submerged underwater all year round. In 1978, when the Karajan Dam began its construction, five villages, including Bej, went under the storage reservoir. By 1980, the Vasava family had to find a new home with the compensation money — Rs ₹6,200 for 2 acres of land.

The Vasavas chose to rebuild their life and a new home in Kandbudi, which over the years got populated with about 24 families with the same history.

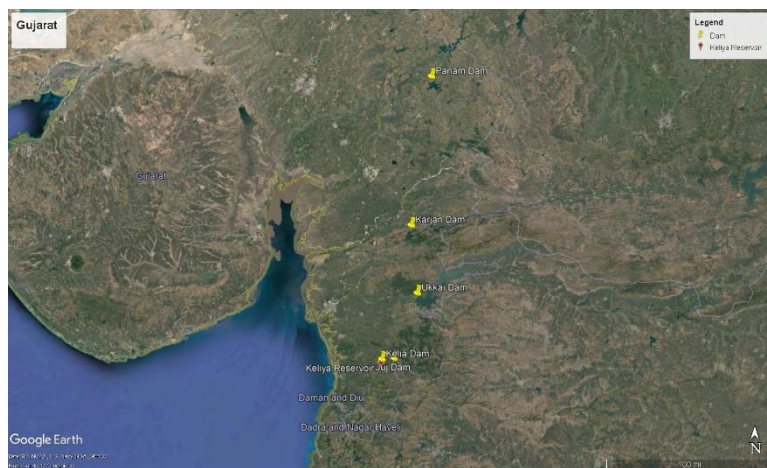
Bej is now unfamiliar turf — when Vasava visits her mother’s home across the village, she has to take a boat that is rowed right over her former home.

“We had a big tree in our yard in Bej. When we row over our old home, we can still see the ends of its branches sticking out of the water, dukh lagta hai dekh kar [it is upsetting],” says Vasava.

The Vasava family made a living from farming in Bej but now everyone is engaged in non-agricultural professions. *“We buy our vegetables, and Dediapara [the block centre] is close-by for market, transport, and schools. I like living here now,”* says Vasava. *“Shanti hai [it’s peaceful].”*

But the move was not easy in the early days. *“I used to cry every day. The language was a different version of Adivasi than that we were familiar with. I didn’t know anyone here. With our lands submerged and livelihoods gone, I was constantly worried that my children would go hungry.”*

The Vasava family is not the only one to have suffered the pain of displacement in Gujarat. Across Gujarat, nearly 2.5 million households—one-fifth of the state’s population—have lost their land and/or habitat between 1947 and 2004. In south Gujarat alone, home to the Vasavas, an estimated 5.2 lakh hectares of land have been acquired for water resource projects alone.



Map with the four dams

To understand how this displacement affected the economic, social and cultural lives of these families, we spoke to five Adivasi families in south Gujarat, who had to be

rehabilitated due to the raising of four dams — Karjan and Ukai Dam in Tapi, Panam Dam in Santrampur and Kelia Dam in Navsari.

The rehabilitation impacted them all, in one way or another. Some find their new life better; others are having a hard time dealing with it. But, one factor binds all these displaced families — the women experienced the resettlement differently from men. When families started their lives afresh, it was the mental and physical burden of the women that multiplied most intensely.

Increased Forest Dependence, But No Legal Recognition

More than 200 km north of the Vasava home, in Santrampur district's Ajanwa village, a small patch of agricultural land lay fallow this April, when we visited. "*We wait for the monsoon to grow corn,*" says Geeta Ben Talar (55), who belongs to the Bhil tribe. "*Jagah hoti toh kheti aur karte, ben (if we had more land, we could have farmed more, sister).*" She has less than 1 *guntha* of land [less than 0.02 acres]. A pipe is attached to a borewell at the edge of her farm but it has run dry.

With sparse irrigation and such a small piece of land, Talar has to look for additional sources of income. One of these is in her backyard—a forest and its produce.

For two weeks every May, Ajanwa's women walk to this forest to collect *timbru* (*Bauhinia racemosa*) leaves. Used to make *bidis*, 50 leaves fetch ₹1. During monsoons, the forests also yield vegetables, medicinal plants, mushrooms, and fodder. "*When we go to the forest with our cattle, the Forest Department [staff] stop us often,*" says Talar.



Talars' field with cattle fodder collected by Geeta Ben piled up at one edge, and the undulating forest behind.

The women go to the forest to find fodder, cut it and carry it home. The work is time-consuming, laborious and disproportionately borne by women.

“In our old home in Vaghoi, we could grow rice and other crops throughout the year with our tubewell. We used to live like patels [a caste considered higher and thus with more accumulated capital],” says Suma Bhai, 62, Talar’s brother-in-law. The old family homestead where they lived till 1973, about 8 km away, had a tubewell which ensured at least two seasons of farming and lush grass to graze their goats and cows. This home, the village and at least 51 other villages lie submerged in the waters of Panam Dam.

The problem is that despite the growing dependence of these families on the forest, the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006—a Central Act that legally recognised forest dependencies of Adivasis and other forest dwellers—does not secure their livelihood.

Of the over 600 FRA claims in four districts — Dahod, the Dangs, Navsari, and Narmada — only 30% had been approved, while over 60% were either pending or had been rejected, found a 2018 study by Working Group on Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO), a Gujarat-based network of over 40 NGOs and community-based organisations that, focus on women’s land and forest rights and sustainable agriculture by women farmers.

Even the land that Suma Bhai’s family bought with their compensation of ₹ 2000/acre does not show legal ownership. The family said they were cheated into buying a piece of common grazing land (*shyamlat*) from a family of grazers that did not even own it. Now, the Talars are trying to prove their dependence on the land under FRA so they can cultivate it but do not have enough evidence to push their case.

“The Forest Department has been asking us to pay fines for encroachment. To evict us from this land, officials became violent and hit my son,” Geeta Ben alleges. *“For a while now, they [the forest department] have not troubled us but the thought that they still can, because this land is not ours legally, is very stressful.”*

The same problem dogs the residents of Songadh in Tapi. After the Ukai Dam, Gujarat’s second largest reservoir was constructed in 1972, displaced families moved to different villages. *“Songadh was one choice but only areas of very dense forests were available for purchase with the compensation money,”* says Ashwinbhai Mannchhabhai Gamit, who works as a paralegal on land issues with Dakshin Gujarat Vikas Sanstha, a part of WGWLO.

Gamit had earlier worked with displaced communities in Songadh in 2014-15. Resettled Adivasis had cleared forest land for farming here and they also came to bank on it for vegetables, firewood, medicinal plants and mahua flowers — collected for subsistence and sale. All these tasks are predominantly done by women. When communities here filed their claims under FRA, they received titles but with blatant errors, they allege. *“Most families got their titles some 8-10 km away from where they found livelihoods,”* says Gamit.



A man sells fish caught from the Ukkai Dam which became a livelihood option for some who lost their lands to the dam

Can See Water, But Not Use It

As the crow flies, Songadh is less than 10km from the reservoir. But the land on which families have been rehabilitated is on the dam's right bank where irrigation channels have not yet been formed. Up to 59 more villages suffer the same fate. After a public interest litigation, the Gujarat High Court in 2012 ruled that a 36 km long canal project be completed in the next seven years on this bank. Only in some areas have the channels been dug.



Kelia Dam in Navsari

"From their homes in Mandovi village [also on the right bank], people can see the water [in the reservoir] but can't use it," Gamit points out. "The water scarcity is so intense that in summers, many villages have to depend on tankers for drinking water."

Some displaced families did end up on the side where irrigation projects reach. While this improves their agricultural productivity, the shift has added to women's workload.

Increased Workload for Women

One such woman whose life has become tougher post-rehabilitation was Naju Ben Gamit (60). When Navsari district's Kelia Dam was completed in 1983, her family, which lost its lands, moved to Mandav Khadak, just 4 km away. Here, a canal connected to Kelia channels water into the family's fields. This constant supply ensures better agricultural productivity though the compensation from the sale of the 11 acres of land they owned earlier could only buy them 7 acres in Mandav Khadak.



The nahar from Kelia Dam

However, the first few years of rehabilitation were hard, especially for the women. As the reservoir slowly neared completion, there was an interval when Naju Ben Gamit's older plot had still not been fully submerged and the new one too had been purchased. The women would travel back and forth to cultivate both fields. They would sow, clear the weeds and harvest the crop, while the men ploughed with bullocks.

"For the first four years, we farmed both lands. And did housework too," says Gamit as we sit on her porch in Mandav Kharak. Signs of economic prosperity like pucca houses and a few cars are visible in this village, likely thanks to the irrigation canal system. The road to their village is punctuated by the *nahar* (canal), brimming with inviting cold water on an April noon. Adjacent to these are fields with standing rice crops, an unusual sight because the crop is grown in monsoon.

Her neighbour, Lalita Ben Gamit, 40, married into this family after they were rehabilitated in Mandav Kharak, but she has heard stories about Kelia. *"Nobody [in the family and other neighbours who had similar history] have forgotten about losing their villages. They still talk about it. We are still known as 'Kelía-wale!',"* she says with a smile.



Naju Ben outside her pucca house in Mandav Kharak

In Dholiwera, a small village in Narmada district, a few families still maintain connections with their old plots that were engulfed by the waters of the Ukai Dam. *“A few families were able to buy some land with the compensation money, but in the dry months when their former lands emerge from the water, they work on that too. They grow moong dal, watermelon, and even rice there,”* says Kirti Ben Vasava. Her father-in-law is one of many to resettle their families in Dholiwera. *“But the women make sure that all the crops are harvested by June.”* As monsoon approaches, the dam waters reclaim these fields.

In their resettled village, after this harvest is done, women engage in *“sukha kheti [dry farming]”*, growing mostly red rice—a variety that can grow with just monsoon irrigation. Women’s farming burden has doubled here too.

Families Fragmented

In Kanbudi—which now houses families that lost their lands to Karjan Dam—women face a different additional burden. Says Harilal Bhai Vasava (40) who was six when the relocation happened, *“In our older village, my father and his three brothers lived together, which meant that the work in the farms would be distributed amongst all the wives.”* But, after being displaced, joint families ended up splitting, with small units settling wherever they could find land.

“I feel this impacted my mother then because she had to work on the fields on her own as opposed to the collective efforts the women could put together earlier,” says Harilal Bhai. Their home has a ceiling with crisscrossed bamboo sheets. *“My mother used to make and sell these [bamboo sheets] for additional income,”* he says. His parents are no more so there is no one to share more vivid memories.

The relocation also stripped the family of another resource that nothing can compensate for—fertile grazing lands next to the river. *“We used to own so many cows in our older village. Our milk production used to be so much that my mother used to make ghee out of the milk cream every seven days,”* says Harilal Bhai. *“But after coming here, sab khallas ho gaye [it all went]; this village did not have any grazing land that could support all those cows,”* his brother, Gopal Bhai (43), adds.

Instead, women now collect fodder from forests for the cattle. Gopal Bhai’s wife was not available for an interview because she was out cutting grass. They offered me a pitcher of cool water, at least drinking water was not scarce here.

But 200 kilometres north from their home, even drinking water is not easily available. *“We make at least four trips a day to fetch drinking water from a tubewell 1km away,”* says Geeta Ben Talar of Ajanwa, Santrampur. This task of ensuring water for the kitchen is always a woman’s responsibility. *“Where we lived before the dam took everything under, there was no tension about drinking water — we had a check dam barely 50 steps from our home,”* adds Suma Bhai.

Women Have No Role in Cash Transactions

South from Suma Bhai’s home, a training programme on agroforestry by the government-run Krishi Vigyaan Kendra (KVK) is waiting to be inaugurated by district officials in Vyara, Tapi. At least 250 people are assembled at the venue. Almost all of them are women.

“We already grow sugarcane and rice,” says Sunita Ben, an attendee, over a post-event lunch of *kadhi*, rice, and chilled *chaas*. Her water-intensive crops flourish because of the healthy criss-cross of canals in Vyara channelled from the Ukai reservoir in the neighbouring Tapi district. *“I will now try and experiment with agroforestry.”*

Sunita Ben is an example of most women with whom discussions were held during the course of this ground reporting. When it comes to all things farming, they participate in decision-making. All agreed that their contribution is equal in agriculture, if not more than that of the male members of the family. While their opinion may not always be considered, they are confident about planning what crops to grow and seeds to store for the next year. But this confidence does not translate to handling cash. So, when lands were acquired for irrigation projects and compensation given, women were nowhere in the picture.

“I don’t know why my father-in-law chose this village to buy land in, and how much compensation we got when our land was acquired,” says Vasava. *“He decided all of those things, and we just landed up.”* In all the families we interviewed, the patriarchs of the family—husbands, fathers, fathers-in-law, and brothers—made the decision of how the compensation money was to be spent. This resonates with previous research findings that a direct cash transaction ‘disempowers women’ who tend to be ‘less able, within the family, to influence decisions related to how the money is to be spent.’



A woman farmer shows how she stores her seeds for the next year in Navsari district

For women, compensation money substituted land, a resource that they knew well, tended to and had some stake in. Women found themselves responsible, especially for the well-being of their children, and yet did not have the agency to influence decisions on family spending. This multiplied their mental stress. As Mandav Kharak's 'Kelia-wale' Lalita Ben shared, *"There was only a certain amount of money given for compensation, barobar (right)? Now, decisions on setting up a home with this money, buying new land, and ensuring that the children get to eat — all had to be made. Women would worry about this."*

Emotional Cost

Rehabilitation also left women more emotionally drained than men. They had worked as labourers to construct the dam that ultimately submerged their fields. *"We were so happy that we got good money so close to our home till the dam was completed,"* says Vasava. *"We were earning ₹3 per day constructing the Karjan dam which was very good for the time. Lekin, ghar doobta dekh kar dukh hua [watching our house submerge felt bad]. Even after we got the compensation money, till the time we settled properly, we regretted it [hum pachtaye]."*

Today, families have moved on but are still holding on to small parts of their old lives by farming on their old lands when they can, fighting court cases, and identifying with the names of their old villages even though Google Earth now shows them submerged underwater.

Vaishnavi Rathore is a Land and Climate Reporter with Scroll.in where she does long-form, in-depth ground and investigative reporting on the environment. Before this, she was leading the environment vertical for The Bastion for three years. She has received various fellowships to support her on-ground reporting and holds an MA in Public Policy and Governance from Azim Premji University.



<https://behanbox.com/2021/07/21/dams-displaced-and-changed-womens-lives-in-gujarat/>

25. Our never-ending quest for a clean and safe public toilet

Elisa Patnaik | www.odishabytes.com | July 13th, 2021

Unlike men, we women can't do it anywhere and everywhere. We need to squat, bend, sit, and manage our clothes while attending nature's call. We have to consider our monthly periods. Take care of a bulging tummy in case of pregnancy. And also matters of privacy and modesty. Accomplishing the most ordinary, universal and commonest of acts, for women at times becomes the most challenging of tasks. And finding a clean, safe toilet in a public place is nothing short of a small victory!

While we have achieved the milestone of an open-defecation-free India (albeit the regular cases of defecation one witnesses here and there), the poor state of public toilets and women's hygiene still remains a big challenge.

A clean and hygienic toilet with even basic facilities like clear lighting, water supply, toilet paper and soap at workplaces, restaurants, shopping malls, theatres, parks, and educational institutions is a delight for girls and women. But sigh! As most of us know and experience, reality is far from it.

Not to speak of the additional challenges when you are on the road. Being a journalist, a working professional and an avid traveller, journeying by road has been a frequent requirement. As a traveller, I have witnessed several changes over the years. The roads have become wider, smoother and better, the drive less bumpy and uncomfortable and it's much easier to pick up snacks and drinks from roadside kiosks. However, one thing has remained constant. The search for a clean and safe public toilet.

My adventures as a journalist and as a traveller have not been confined to the stories I was covering or the places I was visiting. It also includes the wide-ranging probable and improbable locations I have innovated as a toilet to answer nature's call. From a roof-top enclosure, while covering an election rally, to cow sheds and garages, from abandoned wayside buildings to mini forests, I have done it all! All because either there were no toilets or the toilets available were too unclean and unsafe to use. Not to speak about the risks associated with Peeping Toms, insects, poor lighting and what not.

Of course, with the rapid progress made in sanitation, the number of toilets for women has definitely increased. While earlier, there never used to be any separate public toilets for women in fuel stations and roadside hotels, you find them in increasing frequency now. The government has also made it mandatory for petrol pumps to provide clean toilet facilities on national highways.

Sadly, the toilets are either locked or too dirty to use. They lack water and are so dark inside that you struggle to locate even the toilet pan. Many a times, I prefer using an isolated roadside spot than using an unclean toilet.

While public toilets managed by civic agencies in prominent city locations are better maintained and are relatively cleaner with additional features and facilities as compared to a few years ago, there's still a long way to go. And honestly, given a choice, many of us would avoid using them in the first place unless it's an emergency.

While there may be more public toilets currently, the truth is also that many of them are so poorly maintained that they are barely usable.

Clean and hygienic public toilets are certainly exceptions to rules. Not just in public spaces but also in workplaces. My experience of attending several government and non-government offices in Odisha and outside has proved this beyond doubt. Though embarrassing, the first request made to the official being met is to use his or her personal toilet than the one meant for the whole office. Most of the time, a visitor cannot just use the washroom meant for the whole office.

An online survey titled 'Say no to dirty toilets' conducted by women empowerment organization Pinkishe and a feminine hygiene company Sanfe revealed that 90 per cent of women state that the public washrooms in the outdoor environment, be it the workplace, shopping malls or hotels, are not clean and suitable to use in the country.

Most of the travellers and shoppers admitted that holding urine is the only alternative for using dirty toilets followed by urinating in a semi-squat position and wiping dirty toilets.

More than 65 per cent of the women respondents mentioned the risk of Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) associated with dirty public toilets. The survey also spotlighted the magnitude of the issue and the serious need for innovative and affordable solutions for a clean washroom for women. According to the survey, 26 per cent of women were willing to stand and pee by changing their conventional way of urinating to reduce the chances of UTI by eliminating physical contact with dirty toilet seats.

The risks of using unhygienic public toilets are too many to ignore. It's an established fact that dirty washrooms are key triggers for UTIs in women. Failing to find clean, safe and accessible toilets time and again, women who often travel for work resort to other means – such as holding urine and not consuming enough water – to deal with the problem causing significant risks to their health. Holding urine for a long period can cause kidney stones, and other severe kidney disorders and weaken bladder muscles. Not being able to change sanitary napkins during periods due to lack of access to a clean toilet also results in unsafe menstrual hygiene management.

Besides health and other practical challenges, there are serious social and gender ramifications as well. For those women not privileged, lack of access to clean and safe toilets also has an impact on their safety and work opportunities. Women construction workers, drivers, street vendors and saleswomen in small shops etc. often bear the brunt of the shortage of clean and safe toilets in their work areas.

Girls and women also face danger and violence in unsafe public toilets or lack of public toilets. There have been cases where women have been harassed and sexually violated in dark and dingy toilets or in desolate spots while relieving themselves in the absence of toilets.

Since necessity is the mother of inventions, several female hygiene products have now flooded the market to ease and help women on the move to relieve themselves safely. Solutions like Peesafe, Peebuddy (a female urination device that allows women to relieve themselves while standing) have been gaining popularity among educated middle-class women.

We women have learnt to adapt and adopt. To pee sitting down without actually touching the toilet seat of a WC. To carry our own toilet paper, liquid soap, and sanitisers. And to simply withhold the urge to urinate by not going to a dirty toilet. Pinch our nose, close our eyes and not look here and there. Or not having a lot of water while travelling. Despite being aware of the adverse effects of doing so. Sadly, we teach the same ways to the next generation to practice the same.

But it's high time the demand and murmur for a clean and safe toilet for girls and women grows louder as a basic human and health right. I recall an interesting campaign by several groups called the 'Right to Pee' launched in Mumbai a few years ago for clean, safe and free public toilets for women. The campaign has been demanding adequate public urinals for women in Mumbai from authorities. The 'Don't Hold it in' campaign by Hyderabad Urban Lab is another initiative which demands a city where women have equal and adequate access to public toilets.

So, girls and women and boys and men, please protest whenever you come across a dirty public toilet. Highlight the issue, raise the decibel levels and demand for a clean, safe and hygienic public toilet. Stand up against using dirty public toilets. For women's health, safety and dignity. And rights.

Elisa Patnaik is a Development Communications specialist with nearly 18 years of experience working in the media and the development sector. A post-graduate in Economics from the University of Hyderabad and an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) she has worked with several organisations including 'odishabytes.com', 'The Asian Age,' 'Times of India', BBC Media Action and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



<https://odishabytes.com/our-never-ending-quest-for-a-clean-safe-public-toilet/>

26. Migrant women find moving up is still hard

Shikha Sharma | www.indiatogether.org | August 27th, 2021



Migrant women's work largely remains invisibilised and unregulated.

Picture credit: Pixabay

Millions of women migrate each year, but their reasons for moving are not the same as men, and their chances of finding and keeping work are much lower. A gendered understanding of migrants is needed in policies and intervention programs.

At 16.1 percent, India has one of the lowest female work participation rates in the world. Some of the contributing factors have received a lot of attention. Discrimination, sexual abuse and exploitation, and other forms of violence discourage and thwart women from work. There are also social and cultural barriers which have existed for decades - precarity of employment, lack of social security, poor facilities in workplaces, and disproportionate responsibility for child and family care.

One key factor that hardly finds mention in policy discussions about women's employment is migration. We generally associate the word 'migrants' with pictures of men leaving villages seeking work in cities. But women migrate a lot too, and this has huge implications for their ability to find work and keep it. Unseen, yet widespread, this migration shapes the lives of women across all sections of society.

A gender perspective on migration is important not just because it influences women's entry into various ecosystems related to higher education, skilling, and employment, but also because women have significantly different migration motivations, patterns, and obstacles than men. The absence of this perspective is a structural barrier that not only perpetuates the invisibility of female migrants but also prevents them from being recognized as a key component of the budding Indian workforce.

With existing govt policies failing to secure any legal or social protection for this group, migrant women continue to occupy the most precarious jobs in our economy, even as their work largely remains invisible and unregulated.

Facts and figures

Census data tells us that marriage is the single biggest reason that women migrate. Whereas men move mostly for work, nearly 154 million of the total 221 million women migrants reported moving when they married. But their motivations and experiences are not uniform, and a closer look reveals plenty of nuance. For example, whereas women from rural areas who migrated for marriage were more likely to be working than urban women who moved for the same reason. The gap is also quite significant - the National Sample Survey 2007-8 put the figures for the two groups at 31 percent and 13.3 percent respectively.

In fact, women who moved for marriage constitute a large share of the female workforce, an overwhelming 62.5 percent in rural areas and 31.2 percent even in urban areas. The bottom line is that *"Women who move for marriage are a majority (57.4 percent) of the female workforce in India"*, concludes a report by the government's working group on migration.

Census data on migration fails to capture this reality because the surveys ask for only one reason to be stated for migration. *"This is usually stated as marriage and the secondary reason, that is finding work at the destination, may not be mentioned,"* Priya Deshingkar and Shaheen Akhtar of London's Overseas Development Institute wrote in an April 2009 paper published by the United Nations Development Programme.

The last couple of decades have also seen an increasing number of women migrating for economic reasons, data shows. Between 2001 and 2011, female migration more than doubled from 4.1 million to 8.5 million. In the same period, the number of women who cited business as a reason for migration also increased by 153 percent, more than four times faster than the rate for men (35 percent). There is a change in their destinations; from a largely rural-to-rural tilt until the late 1990s, more women have begun migrating to urban areas in the last two decades. In 2001, 47 percent of all women migrating for work/business were in urban areas. By 2011, this had jumped to 58 percent.

Experts say that this trend is likely to have further intensified since 2011 with the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data for 2017-18 revealing a drastic drop of seven percentage points in work participation rates of rural women. In absolute numbers, that amounts to nearly 25 million women workers exiting the rural workforce since 2011-12, and nearly 47 million women if the earlier 2004-05 data is taken as the benchmark. And even though this decline persists across all social groups, it is highest for women from SC/ST categories; their WPR has dropped by nearly 10 percentage points from 2011-12 to 2017-18.

"Such a large-scale, and historically unprecedented eviction of women from the rural workforce, especially of the most oppressed castes/communities, highlights the negative impact ... of agrarian distress, and an employment crisis that is highly gendered," Indrani Mazumdar and Neetha N write in their paper on migration, gender, and trafficking.

Reasons for female migration

A host of factors - both economic and social - are driving women to migrate. In rural areas, factors like agricultural distress, changing land use patterns, increased mechanization, and environmental degradation has increased levels of poverty and unemployment for females, forcing them to move to urban areas for work. In urban areas, the emergence of gender-segregated labour markets post-liberalisation has meant that many low-skilled, uneducated women can find opportunities in the informal sector.

Higher female literacy, as well as attainment of education, are also driving many women to migrate. Largely though, it is estimated that eighty percent of the country's migrant women work in the informal sector - in activities like agriculture, construction, transport, domestic work, and mining on a contract basis. Manufacturing workers constitute the single largest occupation for the female workforce in urban areas (45 lakh women are in this sector), followed by teaching (27.5 lakhs) and domestic work (20 lakhs).

A vast majority of them are uneducated and engaged in low-paid and low-skilled work, data shows. Data also shows that they almost always earn less than men, and are more susceptible to exploitation due to the undervaluation of their work. Additionally, they face added risks associated with safety due to a lack of access to crucial services like housing, public toilets, affordable healthcare, and public transport.

The economic uncertainty and reverse migration due to the pandemic has further aggravated their misery. A survey of women migrant workers from 12 Indian states conducted by UNDP found that their incomes fell by more than half during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic levels. Another study that was conducted in Delhi and Gurugram found that the pandemic not only led to the loss of livelihood -- e.g., far fewer women than men in Delhi were still working a few months into the lockdown -- but also severely impacted migrant women's nutrition and well-being.

The way ahead

Chiefly, two things come in the way of securing legal and social rights for migrant women workers. First, they mostly fall outside the ambit of social benefits and key legislation made for women. Second, the prevalence of informality in their work makes them prone to exploitation, even as it becomes difficult to create rules and regulations to fix responsibility for it. Improving their socio-economic reality, therefore, requires a will to tackle structural challenges around visibility and recognition.

A starting point to do this could involve collecting accurate data that would not just render visibility to these women, but also help fill knowledge gaps that occur in our understanding of this community. As the government launches social security schemes targeted toward women, it should ensure that they should also account for the specific needs of women workers. These could be geared towards quality and affordable child care, wage equality, occupational safety, affordable health, reliable public transport, and safe cities.

Since migrant women are estimated to be the most vulnerable to job losses due to technological advancements, it is essential that they be targeted for skills training and upgradation taking into account the accelerated role of technology in shaping the future of work. The draft Migrant Labour Policy by the Niti Aayog proposes adopting a rights-based approach to creating a suitable policy for migrant workers. While it is a welcome idea, it largely overlooks the specific needs and concerns of migrant women.

At a time when women should be on the move socially and economically after decades of lagging behind men, it seems that moving itself is a big obstacle to their opportunities. A corrective course is needed, which is not only sensitive to the needs of women migrants but also looks at creating an integrated social protection system for them, including across state borders.

Shikha Sharma is an independent journalist and photographer based out of New Delhi. She reports on issues related to youth, gender, education, social justice and development, and has worked with organizations like The Indian Express, Hindustan Times and Network 18. And as the Executive Editor of Youth Ki Awaaz, an online media organization, focused on highlighting issues impacting Indian youth.

<https://indiatogether.org/gender-move-women>



27. Climate-shocked women in India targeted under a new two child-policy

Aatreyee Dhar | www.climatetracker.org | October 25th, 2021

Sultana, a resident at Kisamgiri in northeast India's Assam state, never wanted more than two children; a girl and a boy were more than enough. But when she needed to access birth control pills last year, the floods came.

Her family lives in river islands called chars, floating in the Brahmaputra River from the eastern to the western part of the state. To date, she has been displaced from her home at least 10 times in the last two years. She witnessed ten floods in 2021 and seven so far in 2021.

Now, with the recent birth of her fourth child, the future of her family hangs is uncertain, with threatened access to government welfare schemes that help the char-dwellers tide over poverty.

Assam recently enforced a limit of two children for couples to access state-run welfare schemes such as affordable housing or health coverage. This plan is partially active, but will be fully implemented in the next couple of months, government officials say.

In theory, the new policy—which came into practice on January 1st, 2021—aims to control population growth in the state of Assam. But in practice, it disproportionately affected a climate-stressed Bengali Muslim population, which has been historically marginalised.

The State Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sharma admitted intentions to control the migrant population and even blamed the state's population burden on the Bengali Muslim immigrant population that had settled on *chars* in the western and central part of Assam.

This population is particularly vulnerable to climate change, something that further increases their difficulties to access health services.

The State Action Plan for Climate Change forecasted an increase in extreme rainfall events by 38%. As a result, floods displace this population, adversely blocking their access to family planning methods and other medical interventions.

The climate shocks make it harder for the migrant population to access birth control methods, says Sultana. In her case, floods in 2020 blocked access to medical care from boat clinics or hospitals located on the mainland, preventing her from getting emergency contraceptives.

A report by the United Nations Population Fund says climate-change-related disasters make it difficult for women and girls to access essential health services including family planning, risking maternal health and leading to increased cases of gender-based and sexual violence and child marriages.

Already, the state's 'Population and Women Empowerment policy of Assam', makes any person with more than two children ineligible for government jobs and election to civic bodies and panchayats [village council].

The new two-child policy proposed by the State Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma will prevent access to government-backed social safety nets and healthcare available to the low-income groups in the state (like *char*-dwellers), earning less than Rs 5 lakhs (\$6637 USD).

Around the world, strict population norms of not bearing more than two children have had negative impacts. In China, it created an ageing population on the rise; in Myanmar, it led to the increased statelessness of the Rohingyas, with women resorting to unsafe self-induced abortions to acquire property and government benefits.

A forgotten community

With a small crowd gathered around the camp, a community health worker, Allaluddin, asks only the pregnant women and children to stay for coronavirus and their routine childhood immunisation.

"Men in char-islands think using condoms or signing up for vasectomy would interfere with their labour-intensive work such as farming. On an island of 1200 residents, 540 Mala-D [contraceptives for preventing pregnancy] and 10 male condoms were distributed [by the government]", said Allaluddin.

Sultana's access to health care will be compromised under the new two-child policy, she says. In her community, women have to assume most birth control responsibilities, given the lack of sexual education among men, she adds.

In her case, Sultana needed emergency contraceptives but wasn't able to get them on time due to extreme floods. *"I didn't realise my irregular periods for three months would bring me two more children,"* she sighs. Her family now faces extreme poverty without government aid.

The migration of the *char*-dwellers from East Bengal [now Bangladesh] was induced by the British before India's independence to get around the shortage of manpower and make use of the state's 'wastelands' to generate revenue.

Then, chars were deemed 'wastelands' due to their unused barren or overgrown status. This influx of migrants provoked anxiety among the indigenous local population over the loss of their cultural and linguistic identity and economic resources.

These nativist reactions to claims of land and economy spurred political movements in the state; the Assam movement of the 1980s led to a brutal massacre of around four thousand people, mostly the Migrant Muslims [char-dwellers] of the Morigaon district.

To this day, the outsider/ insider discourse is very much present in the state with discriminatory policies imposed on the char-dwellers; first, they had to prove their citizenship under the National Register of Citizens and now they risk being disowned by the state if they bear more than 2 children.

Freedom is alien

As for the other women residing on the island, the process of conceiving more than two children against their own wishes has been painful. When Saleha —she thinks her age is over 22— conceived her fifth child, she was limping for a long time.

Her struggles aside, she birthed the sixth child caving into her husband's demands. To sustain her family, she works as a daily wage labourer, earning over Rs 200 (over \$2 USD) a day. *"My husband doesn't work. Who will feed my children if I don't?"* she says.

"The idea of freedom is alien for women in the chars, let alone having agency over their bodies," said Shyamjit Pashi, District Project Officer, who leads the boat clinic to the 28 villages in chars dotting Assam's Morigaon district.

The char-dwellers migrate to neighbouring islands when the floods inundate their islands and erode them away, forcing seven displacements so far this year on Manuwara Begum, a resident of Kisamgiri char.

"The islands are breaking away stronger than last year. Going to the mainland to reach hospitals for medical check-ups and accessing healthcare becomes difficult," she explained.

According to Allaluddin, char-dwellers are too poor to afford a boat ride (back and forth journey costing Rs 3000) to the nearest government hospital, located at least 25 km away, and the delivery charges. *"Most of the women end up having home deliveries,"* he says.

When asked about the government's two-child policy, Saleha stares blankly, only to be interrupted by her neighbour, Manuwara Begum. *"We lost our homes. There were floods. We didn't get anything from the government as compensation, or flood relief. The government cannot do this. Will we kill our children for securing aid?"* Manuwara asks helplessly.

Lack of adaptation

Climate change is a key part of the village's inequalities and vulnerabilities. The children's education, for example, was compromised after one of the recent floods wiped out the local school.

Because of the lack of education access, Waheeda Rehman, a mother of 4 girls and 2 boys, says she's waiting for her girl to turn 18-the legal age for marriage in India.

Assam has conducted limited studies on char-dwellers. The last survey conducted 17-18 years ago in 2002-2003 had revealed dismal literacy figures, 81% of men and 91% of women were illiterate.

Allaluddin says the island had as many as 8 primary schools earlier. If you ventured into the foggy tail end of the island, one would come across disintegrated parts belonging to these schools. These schools remained empty last year owing to the lockdown.

"Whenever we visited the schools, we never saw a steady presence of teachers," said Shyamjit, the project officer. Now, these schools don't exist, after being dismantled by the river, say the health workers from the boat clinic and the residents.

Rudabeh Shahid, non-resident fellow at Atlantic Council's South Asia Centre, cites how India's neighbouring country, Bangladesh, battled its soaring population growth by implementing non-discriminatory family planning measures.

In Bangladesh, for example, local NGOs employed women field workers who went door-to-door providing family planning advice and contraceptives to women. In contrast, Assam's population control policy is exclusive of the Muslim population, the expert said.

Secondly, Assam has no climate adaptation policy for its chars. Whereas Bangladesh had implemented land reclamation plans for its chars by directing sediments flowing through the course of the river between cross dams placed on islands and polders, or land rimmed by embankments.

Cross dams are known to hold back sediment. The accretion of sediments behind these dams leads to the formation of large inhabitable islands—and seemingly climate resilient—that may house climate migrants.

"Char islands break away every few months and people have to run for their life. If the Assam government takes measures to stabilise chars by land reclamation or any other measure, there will be permanent schools and hospitals, reducing the gap in education and healthcare and reducing population growth," said Rudabeh.

On 17th September, the residents of the chars were sensing that the river was tearing down their island, silt by silt. After a week, Manuwara said she had fled the island, taking refuge in another char, 2kms away, westward over a phone call.

Over the years, discrimination was something she said she had gotten used to but not without a fight. And with the imminent two-child policy norm, she hoped the government would spare the ones who already had more than two children.

"Whatever has been done, is done. The government should understand this. Now, there is no option but to use contraceptives", she said.

Aatreyeer Dhar is an environmental reporter working on issues imbued with wildlife conservation, climate change and renewable energy. Currently, she is working on an investigative environmental story as part of the EJA Asia Pacific Grant 2022.

<https://climatetracker.org/climate-shocked-women-india-targeted-under-two-child-policy-population/>



28. निर्भया केस के बाद अब तक लापरवाही बरतने वाले कितने पुलिस अधिकारियों के खिलाफ़ दर्ज हुई एफआईआर?

Neetu Singh | www.gaonconnection.com | 14th January 2021



ये है वो मंदिर जहाँ मृतका 3 जनवरी 2021 को शाम 5 बजे पूजा करने आयीं थीं। फोटो: नीतू सिंह

बलात्कार जैसे गंभीर मामलों में आपने पुलिस की लापरवाही के तमाम किस्से देखे, पढ़े और सुने होंगे, बदले में विभाग इन्हें या तो सस्पेंड कर देता या फिर लाइन हाज़िर। जबकि निर्भया केस के बाद ऐसा कानून बना कि अगर ऐसे मामलों में पुलिस कोताही बरतती है तो उनके खिलाफ़ एफआईआर दर्ज हो और उन्हें कठोर सजा मिले। बीते आठ सालों में आपने ऐसे कितने मामले सुने जिसमें पुलिस के खिलाफ़ धारा 166 (ए) के तहत एफआईआर दर्ज हुई हो? उत्तर प्रदेश पुलिस ये आंकड़े देने में असमर्थ है।

अभी हाल ही में हुए यूपी के बदायूं गैंगरेप केस में लापरवाही बरतने वाले उधैती थाना क्षेत्र के तत्कालीन इंस्पेक्टर राघवेंद्र प्रताप सिंह के खिलाफ़ धारा 166 (ए) के तहत मुकदमा दर्ज हुआ है। जब किसी पुलिस अधिकारी के खिलाफ़ एफआईआर दर्ज हुई हो। इस मामले से जुड़े अधिकारी और जानकार इसे पुलिस की अच्छी पहल बता रहे हैं। उनका मानना है इससे पुलिस में भय पैदा होगा जिससे वो आगे से लापरवाही नहीं बरतेंगे और मामले की गम्भीरता को समझेंगे।

बरेली रेंज के आईजी राजेश कुमार पाण्डेय ने गाँव कनेक्शन को फोन पर बताया, "बरेली रेंज का यह पहला मामला है जब लापरवाही बरतने पर उधैती के तत्कालीन इंस्पेक्टर के खिलाफ एफआईआर दर्ज हुई है। निर्भया काण्ड के बाद आईपीसी की धाराओं में बहुत सारे बदलाव हुए। कानून में ये व्यवस्था है कि रेप जैसे गंभीर मामलों में यदि कोई पुलिसकर्मी लापरवाही बरतता है तो उसके खिलाफ उसी थाने में धारा 166 (ए) के तहत मुकदमा दर्ज हो।"

राजेश कुमार पाण्डेय आगे कहते हैं, "बदायूं केस में पुलिस की गंभीर लापरवाही रही है। इंस्पेक्टर मौके पर नहीं पहुंचा, उसने अपने एसएसपी को भी गुमराह किया। सूचना मिलते ही उसे तुरंत एफआईआर दर्ज करनी चाहिए थी, मौके पर पहुंचकर जांच-पड़ताल करनी चाहिए थी और सही गलत का पता लगाना चाहिए था पर उसने इसमें से कुछ भी नहीं किया।"

वर्ष 2012 में दिल्ली में हुए निर्भया कांड के बाद सरकार ने यह महसूस किया कि महिलाओं के खिलाफ होने वाले अत्याचार और उत्पीड़न के मामलों में कानून में स्पष्ट दिशा निर्देश नहीं होने के कारण अक्सर दोषी बच निकलते हैं। कई मामलों में पुलिस व चिकित्सक भी अपने कर्तव्य का निर्वहन करने में आनाकानी करते हैं। जिस पर न्यायालय भी समय-समय पर टिप्पणी करती रही है। इन सभी से छुटकारा पाने के लिए आईपीसी की धारा 166 में संशोधन कर धारा 166 (ए) तथा धारा 166 (बी) को संसद में पारित कराकर कानून बना दिया गया।

धारा 166 (ए) में यह प्रावधान है कि कोई भी महिला दुष्कर्म, एसिड फेंकना व मानव व्यापार से संबंधित मामलों की सूचना वह स्वयं या किसी अन्य के माध्यम से पुलिस को देती है तो उस सूचना पर पुलिस अधिकारी का कर्तव्य है कि वह तुरंत केस दर्ज कर जल्द से जल्द पीड़िता को ईसाफ दिलाए। पुलिस अधिकारी द्वारा केस न दर्ज करने या उसमें आनाकानी करने की स्थिति में संबंधित पुलिस अधिकारी के विरुद्ध आईपीसी की धारा 166 (ए) के तहत मुकदमा दर्ज करना पुलिस अधिकारी की कानूनी बाध्यता है। जिसमें दोषी पाये जाने पर संबंधित पुलिस अधिकारी को दो साल तक की सजा व जुर्माने का प्रावधान किया गया।

महिलाओं से संबंधित ऐसे मामलों में इलाज करने में निजी व सरकारी अस्पताल प्रशासन द्वारा आनाकानी करने या इलाज करने से इंकार करने पर आईपीसी की धारा 166 (बी) के तहत संबंधित चिकित्सक के विरुद्ध मुकदमा दर्ज किया जा सकता है। जिसमें दोषी पाये जाने पर एक साल तक की सजा व जुर्माने का प्रावधान है। निर्भया के केस के बाद पॉक्सो जैसे मामलों में पुलिस के खिलाफ लापरवाही बरतने पर सेक्शन 21 (बी) के तहत एफआईआर का प्रावधान है। महत्वपूर्ण बात यह है कि जानकारी के आभाव में पुलिस के खिलाफ कोई एफआईआर दर्ज नहीं करवा पाता। यही वजह है कि ये कानून लागू हुए आठ साल हो गये पर अभी तक किसी को सजा नहीं मिली।

यूपी, झारखंड और बिहार राज्यों में महिलाओं को निःशुल्क कानूनी विधिक सलाह प्रदान करने वाली संस्था एसोसिएशन फॉर एडवोकेसी एंड लीगल इनिशिएटिव (आली) की कार्यकारी निदेशक एवं वकील रेनु मिश्रा कहती हैं, "मेरी जानकारी में आठ साल इस कानून को लागू हुए हो गये हैं लेकिन यूपी में किसी को भी सजा नहीं मिली है। बदायूं में पुलिस के खिलाफ एफआईआर दर्ज हुई ये विभाग

की तरफ से एक अच्छा कदम है पर इसमें ये जरूरी है कि निष्पक्ष होकर जांच हो, समय से चार्जशीट फाइल हो अगर वो दोषी पाया जाए तो उसे सजा भी मिले।"



ये है वो कमरा जहाँ मृतका रहती थीं. फोटो: नीतू सिंह

रेनू मिश्रा आगे कहती हैं, "कई बार जब मामले तूल पकड़ लेते हैं तब पुलिस के खिलाफ़ एफआईआर तो दर्ज हो जाती है पर चार्जशीट से नाम हटा दिया जाता है। ये कार्रवाई खानापूर्ति के लिए न हो, हो सकता है इसमें एफआर (फाइनल रिपोर्ट) लगा दी जाए क्योंकि ज्यादातर मामलों में ऐसा देखने को मिला है कि पुलिस, पुलिस के खिलाफ कार्रवाई नहीं करती। अगर इस मामले में सख्त कार्रवाई हुई तो एक अच्छा संदेश जाएगा, पुलिस में अपनी जवाबदेही को लेकर भय होगा।"

आली संस्था द्वारा सूचना के अधिकार के तहत ये ये जानकारी प्राप्त की गयी कि 166 (ए) के तहत लापरवाही बरतने पर कितने पुलिस कर्मियों के खिलाफ एफआईआर दर्ज हुई है? जवाब में उन्हें पता चला कि यूपी में एक भी एफआईआर दर्ज नहीं हुई है, बदायूं गैंगरेप वो पहला मामला है जहाँ पुलिस के खिलाफ इस धारा के तहत कार्रवाई हुई है।

उत्तर प्रदेश की पूर्व डीजीपी सुतापा सान्याल कहती हैं, "पुलिस में जवाबदेही तय नहीं है, सिस्टम में ही कई दिक्कतें हैं। पुलिसिंग की ट्रेनिंग और रीफ्रेशर ट्रेनिंग में संवेदनशीलता पर बात बढ़ानी होगी। ट्रेनिंग में मनोवैज्ञानिक को भी शामिल करना होगा जो एटीट्यूड पर बात करे। ऐसा ट्रेनिंग मॉड्यूल होना चाहिए जिसमें व्यवहारिकता पर बात हो। एसओपी बनानी होगी, जिससे जवाबदेही तय हो। जो लीडर हैं उन्हें बताना होगा कि 166 (ए) में कोई कोताही नहीं बरती जाएगी।"

बदायूं के उधेती थाना पुलिस पर आरोप है कि मृतका का परिवार जब 4 जनवरी 2021 थाने शिकायत लेकर पहुंचा तो उसे तहरीर रखकर टरका दिया गया। परिजनों ने 112 पर फोन किया तब शाम को पुलिस पहुंची। घटना के 18 घंटे बाद शव का पंचनामा हुआ और 48 घंटे बाद पोस्टमार्टम। घटना का मुख्य आरोपी महंत घटना के दूसरे दिन शाम तक मन्दिर में ही बना रहा और सबको यह कहकर गुमराह करता रहा कि मृतका पूजा करने आयी थी और कुएं में गिर गयी जिस वजह से उसकी मौत हो गयी। पांच जनवरी को जब पोस्टमार्टम रिपोर्ट आयी तब कहीं जाकर इस घटना खुलासा हुआ

और तब पुलिस सक्रिय हुई। मुख्य आरोपी महंत सत्यनारायण पर 50,000 रुपए का इनाम भी रखा गया था। सात जनवरी को देर रात ग्रामीणों ने महंत को पकड़कर पुलिस के हवाले कर दिया था, दो आरोपी पहले ही गिरफ्तार हो चुके थे।



मृतका अपने बेटे के लिए स्वेटर बना रही थीं, बेटे ने कहा, 'अब ये स्वेटर कौन बनाएगा' फोटो : नीतू सिंह

निर्भया केस लड़ चुकीं वर्तमान में हाथरस केस लड़ रही वकील सीमा समृद्धि कुशवाहा गाँव कनेक्शन को फोन पर बताती हैं, "इस कानून के लागू होने के बाद अगर किसी पुलिस अधिकारी के खिलाफ 166 (ए) के तहत एफआईआर दर्ज हुई है तो हमारी जानकारी में बढ़ाचूँ पहला मामला होगा। मैं इस महत्वपूर्ण कदम की सराहना करती हूँ इससे अपराधियों में भय पैदा होगा और जनता का भरोसा पुलिस पर बढ़ेगा। मेरे पास जितने भी केस आते हैं उसमें 90 फीसदी मामलों में पुलिस की लापरवाही होती है। निर्भया केस के बाद कई नये कानून बने, धाराओं में संशोधन हुआ लेकिन उसका क्रियान्वयन न के बराबर देखने को मिला।"

गाँव कनेक्शन ने उत्तर प्रदेश पुलिस महानिदेशक से लेकर कई वरिष्ठ अधिकारियों को फोन करके ये आंकड़े जुटाने की कोशिश की कि धारा 166 (ए) लागू होने के बाद कितने पुलिस अधिकारियों पर लापरवाही बरतने पर इस कानून के तहत एफआईआर दर्ज हुई है पर पुलिस विभाग ये आंकड़े देने में असमर्थ रहा। एडीजी लॉ एंड ऑर्डर ने कहा कि ईमेल करिए तब आंकड़े मिलेंगे। इस जानकारी के सन्दर्भ में गाँव कनेक्शन ने पुलिस महानिदेशक को एक ईमेल भेजते हुए पुलिस विभाग से सम्बंधित जितनी भी मेल आईडी वेबसाइट पर मिलीं सभी को सीसी करते हुए 12 जनवरी को एक ईमेल भेजा है। जैसे ही मेल का जवाब आ जाएगा खबर में अपडेट कर दिया जाएगा।

यूपी में बलात्कार जैसे मामलों की घटनाएँ थमने का नाम नहीं ले रही हैं। एक के बाद एक लगातार वीभत्स घटनाएँ सामने आ रही हैं। अभी हाल ही में जारी राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो के वर्ष 2019 के आंकड़ों के अनुसार देश भर में हर दिन बलात्कार की 87 घटनाएँ दर्ज की जा रही हैं। इसी साल

बलात्कार के कुल 32,033 मामले दर्ज किये गए, जिसमें सिर्फ उत्तर प्रदेश में ही 3,065 मामले थे, जो कुल बलात्कार के मामलों का 10 प्रतिशत हैं।



कमरे में मृतका का सामान रखा देख उनके बच्चे रह-रहकर अपनी माँ को याद कर भावुक हो रहे थे. फोटो: नीतू सिंह

महिलाओं को कानूनी विधिक सलाह प्रदान करने वाली दो संस्थाएं एसोसिएशन फॉर एडवोकेसी एंड लीगल इनिशिएटिव (आली) और कॉमनवेल्थ ह्यूमन राइट्स इनिशिएटिव (सीएचआरआई) ने यूपी के 2016-19 के बीच घटित 14 ऐसे मामलों के बीच 2019-20 में एक शोध किया। रिपोर्ट के अनुसार 11 मामलों की थाने में एफआईआर दर्ज कराने में दो दिन से लेकर 228 दिन तक का वक़्त लगा, वो भी तब जब हर पीड़िता की मदद के लिए एक सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता का साथ था। इस रिपोर्ट के अनुसार 14 में से हर मामले में पुलिस ने पहली बार में प्रथम सूचना रिपोर्ट (एफआईआर) दर्ज करने से मना कर दिया। रिपोर्ट में यह भी बताया गया है कि पुलिस के इस रवैए के खिलाफ़ विधिक उपायों को आजमाना मुश्किल है और अक्सर इसका हल नहीं निकलता।

इस रिपोर्ट पर सुप्रीम कोर्ट की वकील वृंदा गोवर कहती हैं, "यह रिपोर्ट आज के दौर में महत्वपूर्ण है। इस बात को लिखना और समझना बहुत जरूरी है कि थाने के अंदर जानकारी का बहुत अभाव है। बलात्कार को लेकर पुरानी सोच उन पुलिस वालों में भी है जिन्हें न बलात्कार की समझ है ना ही कानून की। एनसीआरबी के आंकड़े बताते हैं कि किस कदर केस बढ़ रहे हैं। पर उपाय के नाम पर कुछ भी नहीं हो रहा है।"

सीमा समृद्धि कुशवाहा अप्रैल 2021 में ललितपुर जिले में हुए एक केस का उदाहरण देती हैं कि एक 15 साल की बच्ची के साथ उसका पड़ोसी रेप करता है, पीड़िता आहत होकर आग लगा लेती हैं। पीड़िता को डराया-धमकाया जाता है कि अगर उसने पुलिस से कुछ कहा तो उसके भाई और पिता को वो मार देंगे। पीड़िता बयान देती है कि उसने गुस्से में आकर आग लगा ली। पुलिस बिना किसी जांच पड़ताल के एफआईआर दर्ज कर लेती है कि बच्ची ने आत्महत्या की कोशिश की। जब मेरे संज्ञान में यह मामला आया तो मुझे थानाध्यक्ष से लेकर मुख्यमंत्री तक बहुत सारे ट्वीट करने पड़े,

जिले के सभी जिम्मेदार अधिकारियों को फोन किया तब कहीं जाकर एक महीने में 164 के बयान दर्ज हो पाए और आरोपी गिरफ्तार हुआ। वहां के जांच अधिकारी को सिर्फ सस्पेंड किया गया जो पर्याप्त नहीं था। ज्यादातर मामलों में पुलिस धाराएं बहुत हल्की लगाती है जिससे केस बहुत कमजोर हो जाता है और अपराधियों को सजा कम मिलती है। लंबित पड़े मामले भी अपराधियों को बढ़ावा देते हैं क्योंकि उन्हें पता है सजा मिलने में सालों लग जाएंगे।

चार मार्च, 2020 को लोकसभा में केंद्रीय कानून मंत्री रवि शंकर प्रसाद ने एक प्रश्न के जवाब में बताया, "उच्च न्यायालय से प्राप्त जानकारी के अनुसार, देश भर में 31 दिसम्बर 2019 तक बलात्कार और पाक्सो एक्ट से जुड़े लंबित मामलों की संख्या 2,44,001 है।" कानून और न्याय मंत्रालय द्वारा लोकसभा में एक लिखित जवाब के अनुसार, उत्तर प्रदेश में सबसे ज्यादा 66,994 मामले कोर्ट में लंबित हैं। दूसरे और तीसरे स्थान पर महाराष्ट्र और पश्चिम बंगाल आते हैं, जहाँ क्रमशः 21,691 और 20,511 मामले लंबित हैं।

इससे पहले दिसम्बर में केंद्रीय कानून मंत्री रविशंकर प्रसाद ने बलात्कार के मामलों की जांच और फैसलों में तेजी लाने के लिए सभी राज्यों के मुख्यमंत्रियों और हाई कोर्ट के न्यायाधीशों को पत्र लिखा था। इस पत्र में उन्होंने बलात्कार और पाक्सो के मामलों में जांच दो महीने में, जबकि ऐसे सभी मामलों में ट्रायल छह महीने में पूरी करने की बात कही थी। कानून मंत्री ने पत्र में देश में 1023 फ़ास्ट ट्रैक कोर्ट खोले जाने की भी बात कही थी।

उत्तर प्रदेश के पूर्व आईजी आरके चतुर्वेदी गाँव कनेक्शन को बताते हैं, "दुर्भाग्य से पुलिस प्रोटोकॉल छोड़ कर बाकी सब कुछ करती है। आप हाथरस मामले को ही देख लीजिये एससी-एसटी एक्ट का मामला था तो 24 घंटे के अन्दर डीएसपी को मौके का मुआयना कर लेना चाहिए था, जो नहीं किया गया। मामले की तुरंत जांच कर सच्चाई सामने लानी चाहिए थी, जो नहीं की गयी, इसलिए पुलिस की विश्वसनीयता पर सवाल उठते हैं।"



बदायूं जिले का ये वो आंगनबाड़ी केंद्र है जहाँ वो सहायिका पढ़ाती थीं। फोटो: नीतू सिंह

निर्भया केस के बाद ही महिला सुरक्षा के लिए केंद्र सरकार ने साल 2013 में 'निर्भया फंड' की स्थापना की गयी। निर्भया फंड के तहत वित्त मंत्रालय द्वारा राज्य सरकारों को पैसा जारी किया जाता है जिसको एक निश्चित समय (तीन से छः महीने) में प्रशासन को पीड़िता तक पहुंचाना होता है। पूरे देश में स्वीकृत फंड का केवल 63.45 प्रतिशत ही खर्च हो पाया। फंड का खर्च न हो पाना भी पुलिस की लापरवाही है।

दिल्ली से बदायूं मृतका के परिजनों से मिलने पहुंची राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग की सदस्य चन्द्रमुखी देवी ने भी पुलिस की कार्रवाई पर सवाल उठाये, "मैं पुलिस की भूमिका से बिल्कुल संतुष्ट नहीं हूँ। पुलिस अधीक्षक के अनुसार जब मृतका घर आयी थी तब जिंदा थी अगर उसे समय से इलाज मिल जाता, कार्रवाई हो जाती तो हो सकता है आज वो जिंदा होती। अगर पुलिस अनावश्यक लाठियां भांजने के बजाए ऐसे केसों में संवेदनशीलता दिखाए, त्वरित कार्रवाई करके दोषियों को सजा दिलाए तभी ये घटनाएं रुक सकती हैं।"

यूपी के बदायूं जिले में एक 40 वर्षीय आंगनबाड़ी सहायिका अपने गाँव से लगभग 12 किलोमीटर दूर अपने मायके में बने एक मंदिर में 3 जनवरी 2021 की शाम 5 बजे पूजा करने गई थीं। मृतका के बेटे ने बताया, "मंदिर के महंत (मुख्य आरोपी) ने दिन में मम्मी को कई बार फोन किया था, शाम पांच बजे वो अकेले घर से निकलीं थीं। रात साढ़े ग्यारह बजे महंत दो और लोगों के साथ उन्हें घर छोड़ गया था। वो खून से लथपथ थीं उनकी सांसे नहीं चल रही थीं। हम पुलिस के पास सुबह 10 बजे पहुंचे, पर वहां से कोई नहीं आया तब 112 पर फोन किया। शाम करीब चार बजे पुलिस आयी।"

वहीं मृतका की 60 वर्षीय माँ बुजुर्ग माँ उघैती पुलिस पर आरोप लगाया, "उस दिन पुलिस ने मुझसे कहा, "पंचायतनामा भरकर मिट्टी जला दो, तुम्हारे पास पैसा नहीं है ... केस कैसे लड़ पाओगी?" तुम बुजुर्ग हो, कौन करेगा केस की पैरवी? हमने पुलिस से बहुत कहा कि हम मिट्टी जला देंगे बस आप एक बार चलकर मेरी बेटी की हालत देख लीजिये और उस बाबा से इतना पूछ लीजिये, आखिर कैसी मरी वो? मुझे धीर (तसल्ली) हो जायेगी, पर पुलिस ने मेरी एक न सुनी।"

सीमा समृद्धि कहती हैं, "पुलिस तब तक किसी मामले में त्वरित कार्रवाई नहीं करती जब तक की वो मामला बहुत ज्यादा हाईलाइट न हो जाए। हमारे देश की पुलिस अलग ही अपनी वर्दी के रौब में रहती है। इनके ऊपर राजनैतिक दबाव रहता है, ये पित्रसत्तात्मक सोच रखते हैं, भ्रष्टाचार बहुत है, जातिगत सोच रखते हैं, इनके पास सेन्स ऑफ़ ह्यूमर नहीं है। बिना किसी जांच-पड़ताल के ये केस को सही-गलत ठहरा देते हैं। यही वजह है अपराधियों में पुलिस का खौफ़ ख़त्म हो गया है, घटनाओं की वीभत्सता लगातार बढ़ रही है।"

Neetu Singh is an independent journalist and the founder of 'Shades of Rural India'. She is keenly sensitive towards issues of women empowerment, sexual and gender based violence, and tribal issues. Her reporting of cases of gender based violence in rural India has led to effective police action and justice for survivors and in 11 years, Neetu won Laadli Media and Advertising award 8 times for Gender Sensitive reporting. She has also won Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Women Media persons and Priyanka Dahele Award for a young promising Journalist in 2020.



<https://www.gaonconnection.com/desh/how-many-negligent-police-officers-filed-fir-after-nirbhaya-case-48563>

Redefining and Reclaiming

These are the stories of grit and gumption of women facing the most difficult circumstances and challenges which look almost insurmountable. Each story is an inspiration and leaves the readers cheering their spirit and verve.

‘How women in rural India are learning to fight misinformation’ by Priyam Nayak is one part analysis of gendered access to information and one-part inspiring story of rural women coming together to fight misinformation in uncertain and challenging pandemic times. The article encapsulates how patriarchy shapes the transmission and dissemination of information and is an impediment to learning and growth.

Nivedita Ramesh’s, **‘Dear mom, it’s me. Writing this coz, I do not want to become you’** is a personal narrative of a daughter reclaiming her identity from the shackles of oppressive patriarchy manifested by her mother. And her realization of intergenerational trauma and the decision to break the chain as she embraces motherhood herself.

‘These women deserve to be commended for their courage in shouldering the responsibility of the crematorium (Translated from Gujarati)’, by Shailesh Nayak is the story of young girls and women joining hands with men and redefining traditional roles in crematoriums, as the nation reels under the tragedy of the pandemic’s second wave. An inspiring narrative, the article reshapes and redefines gender roles in a manner that highlights the higher aspects of humanity in an uplifting manner.

‘Anganwadi worker Jyoti became the ray of hope for Bonda Ghati (Translated from Odia)’ by Pratiba Ghosh is a peek into the wondrous, colourful lives of the Bonda valley and the inspiring story of how one woman is single-handedly bridging the gap between the inaccessible government administration and the various tribes of the region. It chronicles her activities as she travels from one hamlet to the next spreading awareness about the pandemic and the protective steps one must take while being 7 months pregnant.

Rachna Priyadarshini’s, **‘अर्थव्यवस्था में गृहिणियों के काम को भी मिले सम्मान’** examines the economic contribution of housewives and the importance of fixing the notional income of housewives as compensation to honour their contribution. This is set in light of judicial commentary on the issue, a thorough examination of the various nuances of the matter, and why it is critical that these discussions be brought out into the public forum.

In **‘Cold desert’s cancer crusader’**, Hirra Azmat profiles an inspiring health-activist, Dr Nordan Otzer, who at a young age lost his mother and many of his tribe members to cervical cancer. As he almost single-handedly, has catalysed change by screening over 10,000 women and treating over 1,000 women with precancerous lesions. Showing once again that the biggest transformations of society, all begin within a single human heart.

Lastly, with ‘21 में शादी: पढ़ेगी-बढ़ेगी और आसमान चूमेगी बेटियां, जानिए विशेषज्ञों की राय में कितना सही’ Parikshit Nirbhay, weaves a moving narrative on the importance of changing the legal age of marriage for women to 21. As he details the various factors that lead to early marriages, the impact it has on young brides, combined with insights from leading scientists, and women who chose to marry when they were older than 21.

29. How women in rural India are learning to fight misinformation

Priyam Nayak | www.logically.ai | September 27th, 2021



Priya Kumari* is employed as a domestic worker at one of the upscale neighbourhoods in the city of Ranchi in Jharkhand. She has received both doses of the Covishield vaccine. At 30 years old, she is illiterate. It was her employer who booked vaccination slots for her on the CoWin portal and took her to the vaccination centres after they were able to convince Kumari that the vaccines were safe and could safeguard her from severe disease.

“I had doubts about the safety of the vaccine – at one point I was even convinced that the vaccine is a weapon to kill people,” she said. “My husband had received a few such videos on WhatsApp which highlighted how vaccines are a part of a global conspiracy and that people should not get the jabs.”

Despite being illiterate, Kumari has familiarized herself with the nuances of using a smartphone. However, she shares the phone with her husband and two teenage children. She also acknowledges that it is impossible for her and her family members to differentiate between credible information and misinformation or disinformation.

Fewer vaccines, more misinformation

In early 2021, when the central government began the COVID-19 vaccination drive, hoaxes, doctored videos and fear-mongering soon emerged as major impediments. Indeed, within hours of announcing that two vaccines were approved for emergency use, the Drug

Controller General of India had to dismiss rumors that they caused infertility. As leading Indian virologist Gagandeep Kang told Mint, false claims about vaccines causing infertility have previously deterred India's immunization efforts for polio, measles, and rubella.

Doubts and fears about the vaccines were and continue to be more prevalent in rural areas. World Bank data shows that rural India is home to more than 65 percent of the country's population, amounting to approximately 900 million people.

The number of doses administered across nine major cities – New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Thane, and Nagpur – was the same as the number of doses administered in 114 of India's least developed districts – collectively home to about 176 million people.

A survey on misinformation in 20 districts of eastern and central UP, and 12 districts in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh each, conducted by Video Volunteers for The Quint, revealed that overall 26 percent of people believed that COVID is a government conspiracy, but among those who refuse to take the vaccine, 45 percent believed that COVID is a government conspiracy.

An analysis published by Reuters in June 2021 revealed that the number of doses administered across nine major cities – New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Thane, and Nagpur – was the same as the number of doses administered in 114 of India's least developed districts – collectively home to about 176 million people.

Kumari's experiences exemplify the problem of misinformation in small towns and rural India, rather than in areas where literacy levels are higher, economic opportunities are abundant, and gender discrimination is less pronounced. I spoke to women working from three grassroots organizations actively involved in combating vaccine hesitancy and fake news about the pandemic in rural areas to understand the numerous intricacies of the problem of misinformation in India.

Gendered access

One of the main problems with misinformation in rural areas is that there's unequal access to good information, and it's based on gender. A 2020 report by the GSM Association, a trade body that represents the interests of mobile network operators worldwide, stated women in India are 28 percent less likely than men to own a mobile phone and 56 percent less likely than men to use mobile internet and this gap is wider in rural areas.

Sarayu Natrajan, a co-founder of the Aapti Institute, a research institution specializing in the intersection of technology and society, says, *"It is worth keeping in mind that women's access to the digital world is mediated in many instances by the society and patriarchal forms of control over women. So, what they would like to see, and what they do end up consuming, are likely very different."*

“The major sources of information for women are their family members, neighbours, friends and relatives. A very small section of members gets their information from social media.”

Some organizations working on other humanitarian issues have had to adapt to the environment of misinformation. Anjali Rao Koppala, a senior communications associate at SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association) Co-operative Federation tells me, *“The major sources of information for women are their family members, neighbours, friends, and relatives. A very small section of members gets their information from social media. When we say believing, women and men are equally prone to believe in misinformation or fake news. It is that women have less access to first-hand information in general, most of the information they have is all in the form of grapevine and conversations with people. Also, the majority of the women tend to believe what the male persons of their household believe in.”*

Founded in 1972, SEWA is a national union of 1.8 million informal women workers in 18 states that has played a pivotal role in the economic empowerment of women in India. Since the start of the pandemic in India last year, SEWA has been at the forefront of providing immediate and long-term relief work to its members and their families – from the distribution of oxygen concentrators, oximeters, food, health kits, cash transfer schemes, to providing mental health support and conducting vaccination drives. To get more people vaccinated, SEWA has also had to ramp up efforts at dispelling unfounded fears about the vaccines among community members.

“With the abysmal digital literacy levels and the fact that in most households’ family members share cell phones with the male members who have a say in how they should be used, these women have found themselves pushed to a corner.”

Naseem Shaikh, who works as an associate program director at Swayam Shiksha Prayog (SSP), a non-profit based in Pune, Maharashtra, corroborates that in rural areas, women access information mostly through men and they rarely question its veracity. *“Last year, when the government imposed the nationwide lockdown, cases of domestic violence went up drastically,”* she explains. *“SSP workers would reach out to the victims and their families to ensure their safety. We realized there were so many women in the villages in Osmanabad district who had zero knowledge about what they could do in such situations. Owing to the lockdown, stepping out of the house to seek help was not an option. What with the abysmal digital literacy levels and the fact that in most households’ family members share cell phones with the male members who have a say in how they should be used, these women found themselves pushed to a corner. In one instance, we saved a woman who had run off to a nearby village to commit suicide. After that, we organized campaigns with the support of the panchayat officials and neighbouring police stations to educate women about their rights and how they could seek help in such situations by using their mobile phones. The menfolk, of course, weren’t too happy about it.”*

While women in rural regions appear to be at a greater disadvantage when it comes to verifying and accessing information first-hand, it is easier to make them believe correct information, according to Nitika Kakkar, senior program manager at SMART, a non-profit that runs Radio Mewat which is a community radio station in Nuh, Haryana considered to be one of the most backward districts in the country.

“I would say it is linked to the patriarchal social structures—where men believe they cannot be wrong—whereas women are always unsure and open to change their minds if anything comes from authority.”

“Our experience has been contrary. Men are more prone to being misinformed and usually propagate the same to the members of their family, including women. However, what is most interesting is that when given the correct information, women are more willing to accept it and correct themselves than men. Men tend to hold on to the wrong notion and information and tend to be stubborn about it, rather than discuss it or reason with it or believe it. I would say it is linked to the patriarchal social structures—where men believe they cannot be wrong—whereas women are always unsure and open to change their minds if anything comes from authority,” says Kakkar.

Communities fighting back

Poor connectivity, lack of smartphones, and lack of good quality local-language media make accessing quality information difficult in many parts of rural India. As a result, quality news consumption is a luxury, and misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines has been rampant.

“Reaching out to members in remote areas is also a challenge due to poor network connectivity. While in-person meetings could still be relied on in the pre-pandemic world, they have also now become a thing of the past, making connecting to members more challenging,” Koppala told me.

Local NGOs have avoided excessive reliance on digital channels, as it better addresses misinformation ecosystems in rural India. In rural areas, digital solutions to misinformation can be of little help owing to low literacy levels, the prevalence of age-old myths and superstitions and the close-knit structure of communities that creates confirmation bias because most community members access information from the same sources. Building trust and familiarity through real-world interactions are of paramount importance for countering misinformation and disinformation in rural demography.

Radio Mewat provides an interesting case study on how to tap into the community rather than technology. In August 2020, the Hindu reported that only 27 percent of households in Nuh had TV sets and only 20 percent of students had mobile phones. Nuh is believed to be the birthplace of the Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic organization that was castigated nationally

for accelerating the spread of COVID-19 in the country in 2020. The ensuing coverage led to acute stigmatization of the Muslim community in India.

Kakkar explains, *“While even informed and educated individuals have fallen prey to misinformation about COVID-19 in some form or other, the issue was compounded in a place like Mewat. Being a Muslim-majority community with low levels of education, there is a lack of trust in the mainstream media and its messaging. In the initial phase, the majority of the population in Mewat considered COVID-19 to be a hoax and a way for the government to implement excessive curbs on the general population.”*

The problem worsened when members of the Jamaat returned to Nuh and community members started being subjected to discrimination. That’s when Radio Mewat stepped in to address myths and fake news around COVID-19.

Kakkar says, *“Our team set out to scan the internet to look for all the myths and verify them through credible sources. It also picked up material from the MoHFW and WHO websites and developed it into radio programs that informed and assured people. At the same time, with support from UNESCO, we translated our scripts into 7-8 languages and shared them with then operational 290 community radio stations. The radio targeted misinformation around COVID both through broadcasts and through on-ground activities. The team also interacted with the community members to identify their fears and sources of disinformation around the pandemic and used the radio to counter it with facts.”*

“Each group has 5-6 women who are trained in digital literacy skills and checking the veracity of information also. We only trained women because most of them are at home and thus it is easier for them to further the chain of learning among their family members.”

In Osmanabad, Shaikh also adopted a similar approach when false information started to hamper inoculation efforts in the villages. *“People were very scared of the vaccines – some thought they would die if they were vaccinated. Also, booking slots for vaccination on the CoWin app was a problem because not everyone has a smartphone. So, we created Sakhi Task Force groups in each village – each group has 5-6 women who are trained in digital literacy skills and checking the veracity of information also. We only trained women because most of them are at home and thus it is easier for them to further the chain of learning among their family members. They then created WhatsApp groups for their respective villages and added the gram panchayat members and villagers to them. If anyone comes across any information on WhatsApp or other portals, they first have to get the information verified by a task force member, following which the information is shared on the group along with a warning if it is fake.”*

Building trust

On the other hand, SEWA has embraced a model which allows the members of the organization to first understand misinformation trends so that specificity is maintained

when debunking those. Koppola says, *“We designed a vaccine hesitancy survey to know what fears people have been harbouring. SEWA’s teleconsultation initiative facilitated the process of doctors breaking myths about vaccination and encouraging people to register for the same.”*

“The major challenge we face while making people aware of the dangers of fake news is trust,” Koppala says. *“When one would inform people about any particular piece of information or news being fake, their first thoughts tend to be – we too could be lying. It becomes important to build trust first. At SEWA, we have created a system so that community leaders (aagewans) are in regular contact with the community members and are considered as trusted and reliable sources of information, which makes the members feel secure.”*

The Road Ahead

Fact-checking is a fairly new phenomenon in India, and most of the fact-checking portals run by mainstream media organizations publish content in English. In post-independence India, fluency in English was a marker of social standing as education in English medium institutions was unaffordable for the majority. While English medium education has become a bit more accessible, fluency in English is mostly an urban phenomenon and is often class-dependent. This makes it harder for a large section of the population, especially women, to find and consume correct information.

“The vocabulary used is loaded with jargon and academic language. This itself is exclusionary and prohibits the majority of the Indian population to access the material.”

Kakkar says, *“The main issue with regard to the available knowledge base on countering fake news or busting misinformation in India is that most of it is in English, and the vocabulary used is loaded with jargon and academic language. This itself is exclusionary and prohibits the majority of the Indian population to access the material. However, this does not mean that people who are not well-versed in English do not have the critical thinking ability to differentiate between accurate and fake information once they are informed about the same or vice versa. What is essential to battle the disinfodemic is that the conversations and information about this topic need to be available in multiple languages and dialects so that people can access and understand it. The countermeasures also need to keep up with the linguistic diversity of the country.”*

According to Koppola, language is not a factor when it comes to the spread of misinformation; rather it is the next stage in the misinformation dissemination process where women find themselves in a worse position. *“It often does not happen that women take active efforts from their end to visit websites to check their facts. Thus, the websites or information portals that use English as a language are something that community members are often not even acknowledging. Nevertheless, making active efforts to make*

reliable information member-friendly, by having the same information in multiple languages can facilitate its spread as well, and can act as an accelerating agent in Combating the existing misinformation."

**Some names have been changed to protect privacy.*

Priyam Nayak is a disinformation analyst at Logically.ai, conducting independent investigations into the misinformation and disinformation trends on issues pertinent to India's geopolitical landscape. Priyam has been working in the media industry for over seven years with organizations such as Thomson Reuters, The New Indian Express, BBC India, and Hindustan Times and is an alumnus of the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai.

<https://www.logically.ai/articles/how-women-in-indian-villages-are-learning-to-fight-misinfo>



30. Dear mom, it's me. Writing this coz I do not want to become you

Nivedita Ramesh | www.womensweb.in | May 6th, 2021



I love you as you are; I can't stop even if I wanted to. You are as much a part of me as I am of you. But there is only so much that I can do in the face of your constant rejection.

Trigger Warning: This deals with childhood abuse, domestic violence, depression, and postpartum depression, and may be triggering for survivors.

My mother was only 20 when she had me. She got married at 19. My father is her first cousin. When I decided to get married (I was 28), I asked her about contraception, and she said she had never used any. So off we went to the gynaecologist, one she chose (and therefore was closer to her age than mine), but was reasonable enough to explain my options to me.

My mom, who until then was silent, talked over me while I was answering the doctor on whether I intended to have children immediately, to insist that I would very soon; I was 'already old'. We had a verbal joust right there, startling the poor lady doctor into silence. She eventually asked my mother to step out so that she and I could continue our conversation.

To say that my mother was displeased would be putting it mildly.

But it was only after I became a mother myself, at 32, that things came to a head. The gynaecologist whom I consulted through my pregnancy and subsequent delivery was a young woman a few years older than me, so we were friends first, and doctor-patient second.

Six months after my daughter was born, my baby and I were both alone in our new home, a larger place my husband and I had moved to, and closer to my parents, too.

I thought it was just PPD, but something deeper got uncovered

My husband's work had him travelling three to four days a week. I would go days without seeing anyone other than my baby. Since I was new to the apartment complex, I didn't know anyone. I couldn't stop crying. I cried through days and nights. My gynaecologist had warned me about the signs of PPD (postpartum depression) and told me that I was a strong candidate for this because of the mood swings I usually got prior to my monthly period. She helped find me a therapist close to where I lived so that I wouldn't have to travel too far for consultations.

So, seven months after my delivery, I sought help for what I thought was severe PPD. My therapist, after a few sessions, had other views. She said I had an identity crisis, and possible emotional imbalance because of a bad childhood.

None of this made any sense to me – as a state topper in my 10th standard and with top-tier engineering and MBA degrees in my resume, followed by an enviable, well-paying corporate career, I knew who I was. As to my childhood, I had thought it to be a particularly sheltered and comfortable one, considering those of my friends that I knew of. So, what was the problem?

I have never felt comfortable with labels, and once I quit work to be a full-time mom till my daughter was old enough to go to school, I abandoned them altogether. My infant didn't care about my Engineering CGPA or my last designation; if she didn't like the food I made, she spit it out. My first year as a mother was a recalibration of skills, self-worth and hormones, to name just a few of the shake-ups.

I did not want to become my mother!

Around a year of therapy later, my therapist suggested we try to work through the issues I had with my parents, which she felt were the root cause of all my problems. I agreed to start with a letter to my mom, in which I wrote about all the things that had bothered me till then but have been unable to voice.

I also consulted a psychiatrist for anti-anxiety medication. I have always been a poor drinker, and generally never liked any substance or smoke that messed with my thinking. Thanks to the Prozac equivalent that I voluntarily popped every morning, I belched all day like a pig, and also lived in a brain fog for about a week, till my stubborn brain resigned itself to the medication.

Sometimes I would spend my entire hour of therapy crying because this was so difficult – *changing*. I would try and articulate out loud, in a choking voice punctuated by gasps, *why* I was still doing it. I did not want to become my mother. I wanted to raise an

empathetic, well-adjusted, happy child. I wanted to make our home the safe place for her to do whatever she wanted, to be her true self, and to know that she was loved unconditionally.

A letter to my mother

Dear Mom, it's Me.

I know that you are upset about my having to correct the wrongs that supposedly happened when I was a child. Logically speaking, I don't think you did anything wrong deliberately. At 20, you were a child yourself, and you had the responsibility of another life, running a home, and dealing with in-laws who were more unreasonable than most simply because they had known you all their lives.

There are many things that I wish hadn't happened

I was a poor eater so you would force-feed me, and you would beat me if I didn't finish everything on my plate. That was the norm those days. But today this is the reason I stress-eat.

You have multiple compulsions, from cleaning to things having to be done in a particular way, with what I should wear and how I should talk and behave in public, but mostly, you crave control. I was exactly like this too, and now every day I try to let go of one thing that I would have otherwise itched to 'correct' just the way I want it.

The words you used to describe me, call me, still hurt, even at 36

From a head full of why-didn'ts, self-criticisms and anger about has-beens, I feel empty, or at best filled with dreams of letting life lead me, rather than the other way round.

To say that this is easier on me overall is a gross understatement. I would tell you to do the same, except that I know you would resort to calling me incompetent, useless and stupid, which are the adjectives I have had thrown at me through growing up.

At 36, and with achievements and a family of my own, they still hurt. God only knows why.

I know you had a hard life, being abused, marrying early, no support, but...

You were not incapable of emotion or love; you just don't know how to show it because no one showed it to you. I know now that this was because of your abusive father who didn't need a reason to beat you or my grandma. I love you as you are; I can't stop even if I wanted to. You are as much a part of me as I am of you. But there is only so much that I can do in the face of your constant rejection.

Your life hasn't been easy. I know that because you have told me your life stories, over and over and over. I only know the bad parts, maybe because that's all you remember. I know there would have been some good parts too. By spending every minute of your present agonising over and trying to run away from the forgettable parts of your past, you are paying for it today, fifty-odd years later. You are angrier than ever, you feel more powerless than ever and health-wise, you are sicker than ever.

But I choose to #BreakTheChain and help myself so that I can be a better mother myself

I want you to know that I have chosen to mend myself, and my relationship with you. I have chosen to live differently, to find my true self from somewhere inside.

Yes, this is a struggle, and yes, it would mean that I would fail multiple times before I even glimpse success. I know you don't approve of failure, and that you find any conversation about myself to be selfishness personified.

But none of these matters to me as much as making sure my daughter doesn't become the me-you I am pushing against, every minute, every day. If I have to spend the next twenty-odd years trying to #BreakTheChain, I will.

I want her to make different mistakes. I want her to know that her mother is not a perfect embodiment of everything that is feminine, but a flawed human being who hasn't lost hope. More than anything else in the world, I want my daughter to love herself, just as she is.

Lots of love and a hug I always want to give you but am unable to,

Your Daughter

Author's note: I would like to thank Women's Web for getting me to do something my therapist has been trying to make me do for the three years I have been seeing her – write about my mom.

Nivedita Ramesh is currently working as an independent researcher and writer based out of Bangalore. She writes long-form articles on marketing, consumer lifestyle and AI tech and was waitlisted at the Times LitFest in 2018, and is an alumnus of the Bangalore Writing Workshop and the Creative Writing Workshop by SACAC, Delhi.

<https://www.womensweb.in/2021/05/dear-mom-its-me-mothers-day-break-the-chain-may21wk1sr/>



31. These women deserve to be commended for their courage in shouldering the responsibility of the crematorium (Gujrati)

Shailesh Nayak | Mid Day (Gujrati) | May 2nd, 2021

Women generally hesitate to enter the crematory even during the funeral of a relative. However, some women from the Sukhpar village in Kutch undertook the responsibility of cleaning the abandoned crematory and carrying out the funeral rites during this trying time of the covid pandemic. In full solemnity, these women administered the final rites of the deceased body while wearing PPE equipment.

It would have been around eight o'clock at night. Ramjibhai Velani from Sukhpar village, near Bhuj, Headquarters of Kutch, was headed to the crematory to perform the final rites of the patients who had died from Covid. When his daughter Heena said, *"Papa, I'm also coming with you."*

Traditionally, women are not permitted to perform or even attend cremation rituals. So, while Heena's father did not take her with him that night, a new tradition began in Sukhpar village in the days that followed. Brought about by Heena, her female friends, and other women of the village volunteering to work at the crematorium.

Hundreds of patients are losing their lives every day as a consequence of this lethal second wave of coronavirus. Not only in Kutch and Gujarat but also across the entire country, crematoriums are operating at full capacity. Dead bodies are ceaselessly burnt day and night. Bhuj's crematory next to the Khari River is no exception to this. As the waiting list for cremation began to grow and the crematoriums got full, the authorities started looking at additional crematoriums in nearby communities.

Ramjibhai Velani from Sukhpar village near Bhuj heard that there was a need for an additional crematorium and volunteers for the cremation of patients who had died because of Covid. Ramjibhai Velani, who is a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha worker, says, *"Because the Khari River cremation ground in Bhuj is at capacity, the government is looking for new crematoriums and workers. When we received the request for assistance, we started the cremation rites in the barren crematorium outside our village. My daughter joined me, and as the other women in the neighbourhood found out about the endeavour, they gradually joined us too. Currently, 10 to 12 women are assisting us in the cremation process. They bring the body from the ambulance to the funeral pyre, set the body on the pyre, arrange the firewood, and carry out all the customs. We have been doing this for the last nine days."*

The women's involvement and efforts for this initiative were spontaneous. While discussing how she got involved, Ramjibhai's daughter Heena, who was the first to volunteer, says, *"The death rate in Kutch has been increasing. We were informed that crematory rituals would be performed at our village's crematory. My father was going to the cremation, so I told him, Papa, I am also coming with you. However, because it was already dark, I could not go with him. Yet, because the crematorium had been closed, it needed to be cleaned. So, when Papa asked me to accompany him the next day, I promptly said yes and went with him. I was the lone girl in the crematory at the time. I was cleaning when a dead body was brought there and the last ceremonies had to be done. I willingly participated in the funeral ceremonies, and it quickly became routine. Women from our community and friends have now joined me in this initiative. So far, we have performed the cremation rituals of a large number of deceased bodies. I'm serving because I've been given the chance. I'd never been to cremation or seen a blazing pyre before."*

It is often challenging for women to witness the pyre burning in the crematory. Not all women are courageous and strong-willed enough to bear such dark imagery. However, at this difficult time, the brave women are now performing the last rites, standing shoulder to shoulder with the relatives of the deceased. Heena Velani who entered the cremation ground for the first time, says, *"Although this was the first time that I entered a crematory with my father and brother, I didn't feel fear in my heart. I am a volunteer for the RSS's women's wing. I was raised in the environment of Sangh. We are trained to strengthen our willpower. Through this training, we learn how to build our morale and gain confidence. Everyone who helps in the cremation process, including me, wears a double mask. To conduct the final rites, we wear gloves and use PPE equipment. And the first thing we do when we get home is to take a bath. We pour Gaumutra on the dead body, place basil in the mouth, pour Ganga Jal, cover it with garlands, and perform all the rites before cremating the dead. Those women who do not take part in the cremation ritual help with other responsibilities such as cleaning the crematory, bringing the firewood, and arranging the pyre."*

Heena is currently pursuing an LLM and she encourages other women like her to step up and help others. Her friend Rinku Vekariya recalls how she got involved in this mission, *"To be honest, when I saw Heena's picture cremating the deceased, I was frightened. But the next day, I went to the crematorium with Heena and assisted in the cremation rituals. My fear has vanished since that day. I went to the crematory for three days and participated in the cremation rituals."*

When asked if her family opposed her going to the crematory, B. Com graduate Rinku says, *"No, my family did not object, but my mother was reluctant. Yet, because my father was already helping in the crematory, it wasn't a problem for me. I went to the crematory with my own decision. I understood that amid terrible circumstances, we should also volunteer and help."*

Heena Velani, Rinku Vekariya, as well as other women from Sukhpar village, such as Jigna Varsani, Krishna Bhuvva, Tulsi Velani, Mahalakshami Parmar, Devuben Velani, Manjuben Gorasiya, Ravina Gorasiya, Kantaben Vekariya, heroically served at the cremation. While some cleaned the crematory and assisted in the collection of firewood for cremation, others performed the cremation ceremonies. Doing their best to help society during these challenging times.

There was a moment when I was also shaken up from within

Heena Velani being a determined, fearless, and courageous woman, is never scared or hesitant when working at the cremation ground, yet she, too, broke down at one point. When asked about the event, Heena says with teary eyes, *"Even though I had never been to a cremation, I was never scared during the funeral of the deceased. Perhaps this steadiness might be attributed to a lack of connection with the departed. However, four to five days later, when a seven-month pregnant girl from my community lost her life in Corona, I was moved from within at her funeral. A 24-year-old girl who was just now singing and dancing and was about to give birth to a new life is no longer alive. It is tough to say goodbye when one has to cremate a familiar face. Such cases demonstrate the true lethality of coronavirus."*

A service like this...

Even amidst Covid, this man from Ahmedabad serves others by preparing biers for the deceased

Mrugesh Rasaniya, who resides in Ahmedabad and works at Manek Chawk, receives requests from friends and family to prepare biers for their departed loved ones. Without any kind of hesitation, Mrugesh Rasaniya reaches the location where his services are required. *"If there's nobody at the house, or if the person is alone, the parents aren't there, or if somebody has some disability or difficulties and a person passes away at such a house, then some friend or relative calls me to make the bier for the dead,"* he says to Mid-Day. *"I gather all of the necessary supplies, go to the given address, create the bier, and deliver it to the deceased's family. If no relative is present, then I also contact the crematory for the cremation ceremonies."*

Mrugesh Rasaniya continued to prepare the biers even during the pandemic. *"I have been doing this job for many years,"* he continues, *"but the calls have been overwhelming in the last two months. In the previous two months, I've made about 54 biers. People are frightened of Covid. If someone dies at their home, they worry that they will also get infected. Everyone is terrified. When I get a call, I go to the given address to make the bier. This work serves people and hence I will continue to do so."*

Helping the surrounding villages

Talking about the dead bodies brought for cremation in Sukhpar village, Ramjibhai Velani says, *"Dead bodies of the Covid patients from Bhuj's General Hospital as well as private hospitals are brought here for cremation and are cremated as per the guidelines and protocol. Men and women join the cremation rites wearing PPE kits. Apart from Sukhpar, kind men of the other villages, including Rampar Vekra, Bhuj, and Mankuva have also been involved in this endeavour."*

Crematory duties have become a routine for this woman from Nadiad

Women have also gathered the courage to enter the crematory and perform the final rites of their relatives. Taraben has been involved in this duty for many years by working in a crematorium in central Gujarat's Nadiad. And even today, she fearlessly delivers the final rites of the patients who have died of Covid. *"I am handling the cremation of the Corona victims,"* Taraben explains. *"Every day, the dead bodies of patients who have died because of the virus are brought here. Sometimes 10, and at times 15 dead bodies arrive, and I cremate them. In return, Nadiad Municipality pays us money. Aside from cremation, bony (asthi-phool) are given to the deceased's family, and the pyre is cleaned once it has cooled down. I used to be afraid of carrying out this kind of work, but now I'm accustomed to it. The task looked challenging at first, yet, it has become a regular ritual for me, which makes it manageable."*

Taraben's husband, Vadilalbhai, used to undertake this duty, but since his health has been deteriorating and their son is still young, Taraben has quickly adopted the responsibility. They say that we can grow strong only if we act courageously. *"So, as I go to work and gradually gain experience with this task, I can easily perform cremation work every day",* Taraben says.

I will not let a dead body get abandoned

At times when even the relatives refuse to perform the deceased's cremation rituals, Hasina Laadka from Morbi bravely fulfils the final rites of the covid dead as well as the heirless deceased

"No, I won't be able to perform the last rites. My family will get infected with Covid. Can you please cremate them..."

While many people in Morbi shriek in terror, a woman selflessly and heroically takes up the responsibility of cremating the deceased's dead body.

The word soon spread and her name became known in and around the Morbi district. When a dead body arrives and is heirless or is that of a covid patient, whenever Hasinaben is called, she comes running to aid, and that too, out of pure kindness. This compassionate

and courageous woman's gesture of humanity definitely deserves all our appreciation. In such a difficult time, God blessed Hasinaben and Covid stayed away from her. *"I have seen sons refuse to perform the final rites of their own parents in the times of Covid," she says. "However, I had vowed that I would not leave a single dead body unattended or without appropriate cremation. As a result, I execute cremation ceremonies for the deceased. Actually, the public is terrified of Covid and hence it is responding in this manner. So far, I've had 12 such cases."*

Hasinaben has been performing the cremation rituals of the heirless dead bodies, decomposed dead bodies, and patients who have died from Covid in Morbi General Hospital for the past ten years. She explains, *"If a dead body is deserted and no one is willing to even touch it, then I act as a helper and perform the cremation rituals for the sake of humanity. I bathe the deceased in Ganga Jal, lay sandalwood, firewood, barley, sesame, ghee, and basil leaves on the body, cover it with flowers and cremate it with all due respect and customs. There have been cases when the body was contaminated with insects after death from covid."*

Recalling the critical situation that Hasinaben faced after reaching the crematory, she says, *"Last year, when we took the dead body of a patient who had died from Covid, to the crematory in the Visipara area of Morbi late at night, the workers at the crematory asked me to clean the place. The cremation continued from 12:45 to 4 a.m. and later, early in the morning, I cleaned the crematorium. "*

Hasinaben shares how she was inspired to start this humanitarian service, *"My husband was diagnosed with cancer. We frequently visited the hospital for his treatment. We faced a lot of difficulties. When I used to go to the hospital, I saw the condition of the heirless dead bodies. Having witnessed that, I decided that I wanted to be helpful to someone. After my husband recovered, I began to serve in the cremation of such dead bodies and took the vow that this is what I would do with my life. This is the true service of humanity."*

The Sunni Muslim Yuva Samiti, Morbi honoured Hasinaben after seeing her selfless work. Morbi General Hospital also recognized her efforts with a certificate and acknowledged her humanitarian contributions on International Women's Day.

Shailesh Nayak is a freelance reporter since the past 12 years and has worked with multiple publications including Mid Day (Gujarati), Gujarat Samachar, Sandesh and Sambhav Daily in various beats such as Political, Assembly, Education, Sports, Municipal Corporation, Collectorate, District Panchayat and more. Additionally Shailesh has also worked as a Voice Artist and Script Writer for All India Radio And Doordarshan.



32. Anganwadi worker Jyoti became the ray of hope for Bonda Ghati (Odia)

Prativa Ghosh | The Sakala Newspaper | May 2nd, 2021

Work starts every morning from 6 a.m. to 7 a.m. with a message about corona awareness. Anganwadi Didi Jyoti Bardanayak comes out to the village road (Danda) of Bonda village wearing a red and yellow salwar. The story is from Badpada village in Bonda Ghati, Malakangiri district. Holding a plate in her left hand and a stick in her right hand, Jyoti walks around the village and makes people aware of the coronavirus in her own style. Sometimes with humour and at other times in a grim manner communicating to people the lessons of Corona awareness.

From wearing masks to social distancing, and everything from vaccinating pregnant women to delivering nutritious food to children is on Jyoti's shoulders. This green land is far away from television and mobile networks, so it is very difficult for the right information to reach out to people.

Jyoti was in her 7th month of pregnancy when she joined this war. Instead of taking rest at this sensitive time, she made conscious efforts to sensitise villagers about the use of masks, maintaining social distancing, and supplying nutritious food and medicine to pregnant women. Creating awareness among tribal people was a tedious job as most of the people in the Bonda Hills are illiterate or semi-literate.

Without her, this Bonda valley would have been unreachable for the administration. When she used koya (tribal) language to make the tribal people aware of Corona with her funny words, everyone in the community would stop for an hour to listen to Didi's words. Even though she is 7 months pregnant, Jyoti has not turned away from her duties but is doing her work more sensitively and responsibly than before.

In this regard, Anganwadi Didi Jyoti says, *"Since the people of Bonda Ghati are not educated, the biggest challenge is to explain to them the horrible situation of Corona. As people who do not have TV and mobile phones are missing out on getting this important information. The biggest responsibility for me now is to convey the Corona message to them. Even though I am 7 months pregnant, I go to people on the Ghati every day. Since they are fleeing to the forest after 8 o'clock every morning, they have to be reached out to in the early mornings. I call them by banging plates together to bind them. After this, I explain what should be done and what should not be done as a preventive measure against Corona. Also, how not to neglect the pregnant women and children in the womb and let them be delivered at the right time."*

For the more than 7,000 Banda tribes of two panchayats such as Andrahal and Mudulipada living in the Banda Ghats, Jyoti is now the only hope. The word corona is new to this tribe living in Banda Ghati. which is situated on a hill 5000 feet above sea level. Last year, Banda Ghati was free of the coronavirus. So far this year, 12 people have been infected with the coronavirus here. With the help of Jyoti, the district administration is now extending its helping hand for its diagnosis.

With the help of Jyoti, the district administration has been able to reach different villages of the two panchayats and is running an awareness drive. These awareness songs are specially prepared in Odiya and Bonda Koya languages. Also, with the help of ITDA, masks and sanitisers are being distributed to the Banda tribe and they are being made aware of their use.

Prativa Ghosh is a staff reporter with a leading Odia daily newspaper, Sakala, for nearly 2 years and has written on forest rights, environment, climate change, tribal affairs, gender, and children issues. Prior to this he has worked for 9 years with Prameya, a leading Odia daily newspaper as a staff reporter.



33. अर्थव्यवस्था में गृहिणियों के काम को भी मिले सम्मान

Rachna Priyadarshini | Prabhat Khabar | September 26th, 2021

पिछले महीने माननीय सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने एक गृहिणी की सड़क दुर्घटना में हुई मौत के एक मामले में टिप्पणी करते हुए कहा कि घरेलू महिलाएं भी अपने कार्यों से अर्थव्यवस्था में योगदान देती हैं. अतः मुआवजे के लिए गृहिणियों की काल्पनिक आमदनी निर्धारित करना उनके योगदान को सम्मान देना है. सुप्रीम कोर्ट की यह टिप्पणी से उन लोगों के लिए अनुकरणीय उदाहरण पेश करती है, जो गृहिणियों के काम को वैल्यू नहीं देते या उनसे पूछते हैं कि 'दिन भर तुम घर में बैठी करती क्या हो?' इसी संदर्भ में पेश है यह आलेख.

अधिकांश लोगों को घरेलू महिलाओं के काम की कद्र नहीं होती. मतलब घर की मुर्गी दाल बराबर'. पुरुष समेत पूरा परिवार एक महिला के हाथों की बनायी रोटी खाता है, फिर भी कहता है- 'तुम दिन भर घर में बैठी करती क्या हो?' या फिर 'तुम्हें रोटी बनाने के सिवा आता ही क्या है?' दरअसल कुछ लोगों की नजर में कामकाजी महिला वही है, जो रोज सुबह ऑफिस जाती है और फिर घर आकर घर के काम निबटाती है. एक गृहिणी के दिनभर की मेहनत, भागदौड़, उसके प्यार और परवाह की उन्हें कद्र नहीं होती. ऐसे लोगों के लिए माननीय सुप्रीम कोर्ट की टिप्पणी आंखें खोलनेवाली हैं. अब उन्हें यह स्वीकार करना होगा कि एक महिला के कामों को कम आंकना समझदारी की बात नहीं, बल्कि बेवकूफी है.

क्या है पूरा मामला?

सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने उपरोक्त केस की सुनवाई के दौरान एक सर्वे का हवाला देते हुए कहा महिलाएं बिना पारिश्रमिक लिए घर के सदस्यों को सेवाएं देने में पुरुषों की तुलना में कहीं ज्यादा समय देती हैं. जस्टिस एनवी रमना, जस्टिस एस अब्दुल नजीर और जस्टिस सूर्य कांत की तीन सदस्यीय पीठ के फैसले में जस्टिस रमना ने कहा- "घर संभालनेवाले लोगों को जितना काम करना पड़ता है, उसके लिए वे जिस मात्रा में समय और श्रम का योगदान करते हैं वो कोई आश्चर्य की बात नहीं है." आगे उन्होंने स्पष्ट करते हुए कहा कि "घर संभालने का काम अधिकतर महिलाएं ही करती हैं. एक गृहिणी अक्सर पूरे परिवार के लिए खाना बनाती है, परचून के सामान और घर की जरूरत के दूसरे सामान की खरीद का प्रबंधन करती है, घर की सफाई करती है और उसका रखरखाव करती है, सजावट और मरम्मत भी करती है, बच्चों और बुजुर्गों की विशेष जरूरतों का ध्यान रखती है, बजट प्रबंधन करती है और इसके अलावा और भी बहुत कुछ करती है. ऐसे में उनके लिए कल्पित आय तय करना बेहद जरूरी है, ताकि इससे उन महिलाओं के योगदान को पहचान मिल सके, जो बड़ी संख्या में या तो अपनी मर्जी से या सामाजिक/सांस्कृतिक मानकों की वजह से ये काम करती हैं. इससे समाज में भी यह संदेश जायेगा कि देश की अदालतें और कानून व्यवस्था गृहिणियों के काम

को महत्व देता हैं."

इसी आधार पर कोर्ट ने मृतका के परिवार को मिलनेवाली मुआवजे की राशि को 11.20 लाख से 33.20 लाख करते हुए कहा गृहिणियों का काम भी पुरुषों के काम की तरह ही देश की आर्थिक विकास में सहायक है.

नामचीन हस्तियां भी हैं सहमत

राजनेता कमल हसन और शशि थरुर ने कोर्ट के फैसले पर कहा है कि घरेलू कामकाजी महिलाओं को राज्य सरकार के तरफ से हर महीने सैलरी मिलनी चाहिए. उनकी इस बात के बाद लोगों के बीच सवाल है कि महिलाओं के लिए कितनी आय निर्धारित करनी चाहिए. हालांकि यूनिवर्सल बेसिक इनकम (UBI) के तहत महिलाओं के श्रम का हिसाब देने की बात बतायी जा रही है. UBI एक सरकारी योजना है, जिसके तहत भारत के हर बुजुर्ग को पैसों की सहायता प्रदान की जाती है.

सुप्रीम कोर्ट द्वारा महिला के काम की गणना

जस्टिस रमन्ना ने आगे कहा कि साल 2011 की जनगणना के अनुसार करीब 16 करोड़ महिलाएं घरेलू कामकाज में व्यस्त रहती हैं क्योंकि यही उनका मुख्य व्यवसाय है. वही केवल करीब 57 लाख पुरुष जनगणना में बतौर व्यवसाय घरेलू कामकाज से जुड़े हैं. कोर्ट ने कहा कि महिलाएं घर में बिना पैसों के पुरुषों की तुलना में ज्यादा काम करती हैं. उन्होंने अपने फैसले में नेशनल स्टैटिकल ऑफिस की रिपोर्ट का भी हवाला दिया. 'टाइम यूज इन इंडिया 2019' नामक इस रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि औसतन महिलाएं एक दिन में करीब 299 मिनट घरेलू काम करती हैं, जिसके लिए उन्हें कोई पैसा नहीं मिलता है. उसकी तुलना में पुरुष औसतन 97 मिनट ही घरेलू काम में खर्च करते हैं.

पुरुषों एवं महिलाओं के काम की गणना

- एक पुरुष द्वारा रोजाना किये गये औसत काम का समय : 9 घंटे
- क पुरुष द्वारा प्रति महीने किये जानेवाले काम का समय : 234 घंटे (चार साप्ताहिक छुट्टियां छोड़ कर)
- एक पुरुष का प्राप्त मासिक आय : 25 हजार रुपये (औसतन)
- एक पुरुष का प्राप्त सालाना आय : तीन लाख रुपये (औसतन)
- अर्थात् प्रति घंटे पुरुष द्वारा किये गये काम के एवज में प्राप्त आय : 107 रुपये (औसतन)
- एक गृहिणी द्वारा रोजाना किये गये औसत काम का समय : 14 घंटे
- एक गृहिणी द्वारा प्रति महीने किये जानेवाले काम का समय : 420 घंटे (कोई छुट्टी नहीं)
- एक गृहिणी को प्राप्त मासिक आय : 0 (नगण्य)
- एक गृहिणी को प्राप्त संभावित मासिक आय : 75,000 रुपये (औसतन)
- एक गृहिणी का प्राप्त संभावित सालाना आय : नौ लाख रुपये (औसतन)

- अर्थात् प्रति घंटे गृहिणी द्वारा किये गये काम के एवज में प्राप्त आय : 179 रुपये (औसतन)

दिहाड़ी मजदूरों से भी बदतर है स्थिति

अगर महिलाओं के काम की गणना सालाना दर से कि जाये, तब तो इतिहास की सबसे बड़ी चोरी सामने आ जायेगी. साल के 365 दिनों में महिलाएं 5,110 घंटे काम करती हैं. इसमें रविवार की छुट्टियां और रिश्तेदारों के आने पर किया जानेवाला एक्सट्रा वर्क शामिल नहीं है. बावजूद इसके उन्हें मिलता क्या है? सिवाय ताने, उलाहने और उपेक्षा के? एक दैनिक मजदूरी करनेवाले श्रमिक को भी दिहाड़ी मिलती है, लेकिन महिलाओं के श्रम की कहीं कोई गणना नहीं होती. किसी भी देश के जीडीपी में केवल प्रत्यक्ष श्रम करनेवाले कामगारों के आय की गणना शामिल होती है. गृहिणियों के अप्रत्यक्ष श्रम योगदान को कोई महत्व नहीं दिया जाता. उनके श्रम का हिसाब केवल कोर्ट के फैसलों की स्याही में ही सिमट कर रह जाता है.

(इनपुट : सौम्या ज्योत्स्ना)

Rachna Priyadarshini is a senior copy-writer at the Feature Desk, at Prabhat Khabar Newspaper, since 2016. She has previously worked for Pustak Mahal Publication, Ratna Sagar Publication, Arihant Publications, and EDIT-One International Book Designing & Publishing Company as well as with Bihar Public School and Children Welfare Association

<https://epaper.prabhatkhabar.com/2986187/Surbhi/Surbhi#page/1/1>



34. Cold desert's cancer crusader

Hirra Azmat | Free Press Kashmir | 25th February 2021



Growing up as a struggling farm boy, a Ladakhi doctor lost his mother and many of his tribe members to cervical cancer - compelling him to become contemporary Ladakh's cancer crusader.

The thick tyres of an off-road jeep come to a screeching halt, as Dr Nordan Otzer gets off at a desolate area in Hunder village in Nubra valley of Ladakh.

The old-world parish — where the shadows of the brown mountains and fleecy white clouds fall on the barren land — resembles an oasis lying squarely in the middle of a cold desert.

In the backdrop of this scenic serenity, the 39-year-old doctor clad in hiking trousers and thick-soled shoes walks up to a wobbly old-wooden bench under the open sky.

He arranges the pressure apparatus, stethoscope and a letter pad carefully on the worktable. Soon the village women make a beeline to the spot and get themselves examined.

This is not an assigned duty for Dr. Nordan but his own way—a fortnightly check-up camp—of “giving back to his community”.

The medic has already catalyzed change by creating mass awareness around the recurring menace of cervical cancer in the region.

His untiring efforts have resulted in the screening of 10,000 women in Ladakh region so far. Around 1000 among them with precancerous lesions were treated.



But before his arrival as a healer, the villagers were battling an environmental offensive. The oldest NGO (Non-Government Organization) in the region named Ladakh Ecological Development and Environment (LEDE) had become defunct and was unable to address the ecological issues.

With no-one else to seek advice from, the NGO office-bearers turned to Dr. Nordan. He carefully studied the environmental problems and soon under his leadership, the LEDE earned a grant of million euros from European Union.

The aid was to make Ladakh a “livable, inclusive and resilient” Himalayan city. This development led to the revival of the fledgling NGO within a year.

But it was the silent killer—cervical cancer—which would soon engage the medic as a health activist in the region.



A native of Nubra Valley, Dr Nordan is the youngest among four siblings, born to a government teacher father and a farmer mother.

“There were always financial constraints as my father did not have a fat salary,” he says, while treating a bunch of farm women in his open-air clinic.

“In order to fulfill our educational expenses, we worked in the fields with our mother.”

Once done with his primary education from his hometown, he attended Sainik School Nagrota, Jammu, where he studied till Class 12. Later, he appeared in various entrance examinations and got selected for MBBS in CMC, Vellore.

After his graduation, Dr Nordan was posted to a remote hospital in Pondicherry. While serving healthcare in a faraway land, a call from home turned his world upside down. “One day,” he recalls with a sad face, “I was told that my mom was diagnosed with cervical cancer. It was a rattling revelation forcing me to rush back home.”

In Nubra, the doctor son understood that his mother’s complications had grown severe and chances of survival were bleak. He was right. She couldn’t last long.



Once orphaned, Dr Nordan observed some glaring lacunae in the health infrastructure of the cold desert and taboos associated with women’s health. He decided to confront those challenges. While checking blood pressure of a farm woman, he says, “I was shell-shocked to see the large number of cervical cancer cases, majority of them being young women.”

“This was a life changing moment for me,” he adds. “I decided to stay back and help my own community.”



In order to fuel his health campaign and create mass-awareness about women-related health issues in Ladakh, Dr Nordan started an NGO Himalayan Health Project in 2010. As per his research under the project, one out of every ten women suffered from cervical cancer in

the region. And there were four possible reasons for it — poor nutrition, poor immunity, poor hygiene, and polyandry system in Buddhist community.

“In the same year [in 2010],” he continues, “I met some roaming tourists from Singapore in Nubra. They happened to be a team of doctors. After learning about my endeavor, they developed interest in the project and decided to help me with the screening for cervical cancer.”



In the first year of the screening camp led by Singaporean doctors, only 20 women turned up. Soon Dr Nordan began visiting the villages for creating awareness.

“The impact was seen the following year as 2000 women turned up for a check-up in the second screening camp,” says the doctor who has already visited more than 200 villages in and around Ladakh.

The annual screening by a team of 10-15 doctors involves a simple method.



“A ‘screen-and-treat’ approach for cervical prevention is based on a screening test result followed by treatment in the same visit,” Dr Nordan says.

The women with advanced lesions are sent to Delhi for treatment with the help of fund-raising.

Apart from his healthcare activism, Dr Nordan attends to his family resort and café in Leh. He takes care of the food and lodgings when the doctors from Singapore arrive for screening.

“Whatever revenue is generated from the café goes into the Himalayan project itself,” he says. “And that’s how we sustain this health and wellness initiative.”

The doctor has also been proactive in other significant projects like Healthy Ladakh and Anti-Tobacco movements, where he along with some local women association creates awareness on the issues of alcohol and tobacco among the Ladakhi community. At the same time, the campaigner is upgrading his professional skills and qualification to tackle the emerging health issues in the region.

In 2015, Dr Nordan went to Kolkata for his higher studies and completed his Masters in ENT from the West Bengal University of Health & Sciences, where he was a gold-medalist. He returned to Ladakh, this time, as a surgeon.



Back in his open-air clinic, the medic lets his jokes and humour to strike bonds with the simpletons of Nubra Valley.

In the godforsaken grassroots, he isn’t a routine camp doctor with a stethoscope. His sway comes from his disarming smile, with which he’s fighting the dreadful disease.

This unsung activism is currently shifting sands in Ladakh’s healthcare system and making Dr Nordan cold desert’s cancer crusader.

Hirra Azmat is a Kashmir based journalist who writes extensively on health, environment and gender based issues. She currently works as a reporter for a local daily - The Kashmir Monitor. She is also a fellow with Thomson Reuters Foundation, and has written for numerous publications like Mongabay, The Wire, 101 reporters of India, Tehelka Magazine, Free Press Kashmir, First Post, IANS, Dainik Bhaskar, and several local magazines.



<https://freepresskashmir.news/2021/02/25/cold-deserts-cancer-crusader/>

35. 21 में शादी : पढ़ेंगी-बढ़ेंगी और आसमान चूमेंगी बेटियां, जानिए विशेषज्ञों की राय में कितना सही

Parikshit Nirbhay | Amar Ujala | 19th December 2021



लड़कियों के विवाह की न्यूनतम आयु बढ़ाने का केंद्र सरकार का प्रस्ताव अगर हकीकत में तब्दील होता है तो इसका सीधा असर देश की सामाजिक रवायतों, शैक्षणिक परिवेश व आर्थिक ढांचे पर पड़ेगा। विशेषज्ञों का मानना है कि 21 वर्ष में शादी होने पर बेटियां पढ़ेंगी ओर बढ़ेंगी भी। वह उस मुकाम पर पहुंचकर घर-गृहस्थी अपने हाथ में लेंगी, जहां पहले से ही उनके भविष्य का रास्ता तैयार हुआ रहेगा। इसका एक पहलू और भी है, जिसकी जमीं पर खड़े होकर कानून बनने को तैयार इस प्रस्ताव का विरोध भी हो रहा है। समाज के एक तबके का मानना है कि देश में दूसरी कई सामाजिक चुनौतियां हैं।

असुरक्षा, आर्थिक तंगी, कमजोर शैक्षणिक व्यवस्था पिता को मजबूर करती है कि वह अपनी बच्ची की शादी पहले कर दे। तभी कानूनी बंदिश के बावजूद बाल विवाह के मामले सामने आ रहे हैं। शादी की उम्र बढ़ाने से जरूरी वह समाज की इस तरह की खामियों को दूर करने की बात कर रहे हैं। उधर, बाल विवाह पीड़िताएं, 18 व 21 वर्ष में शादीशुदा होने वाली युवतियां इन कानून को बेहद जरूरी बता रही हैं। खासतौर पर इसलिए कि पढ़ाई व कैरियर बनाने की उम्र में ब्याह होने से मिली जिम्मेदारियों के बोझ तले उसके सारे ख्वाब दब जाते हैं। फिर, जिंदगी का मकसद चूल्हा-चौका संभालने, बच्चों को पालने-संभालने में ही सिमट जाता है।

बाल विवाह होने पर संक्रमण का जोखिम मिलता है साथ साल 2009 में ऑब्स्टेट्रीक्स एंड गायनोकालजी मेडिकल जर्नल में प्रकाशित अध्ययन के अनुसार 20 साल की आयु तक में विवाह होने पर एचआईवी संक्रमण का जोखिम सबसे अधिक होता है। केन्या, जिम्बाब्वे और भारत में भी ऐसे काफी मामले देखने को मिल भी रहे हैं। इसलिए बाल विवाह के साथ हम अपनी ही बेटियों को संक्रमण का जोखिम भी साथ दे रहे हैं। इसके अलावा प्रीमैच्योर और कुपोषित शिशुओं में भी कम आयु में विवाह होना मुख्य कारणों में से एक है। शादी के लिए लड़के को परिपक्व होने या उसकी पढ़ाई को देखते हुए 21 की उम्र सही है।

- डॉ. अंकिता, प्रसूति रोग विभाग, दिल्ली एम्स

ससुराल में तालमेल बिठाने में किताबें कब छूट गईं, पता ही नहीं चला कुसुम (बदला नाम) 21 साल की हैं। दो साल पहले उन्होंने ग्रेजुएशन में दाखिला लिया। घर की हालत बहुत अच्छी नहीं थी तो वह कुछ बच्चों को ट्यूशन देकर कुछ कमाई कर लेती थी। घर का जिम्मा उठाने के लिए डीयू में दाखिला लेने के बाद प्रतियोगी परीक्षाओं की तैयारी भी शुरू कर दी। एक दिन अचानक से घरवालों ने उनसे कहा कि 10 मिनट में तैयार होना है, लड़के वाले पहुंच रहे हैं। इसके ठीक चौथे दिन शादी हो गई। वह भी ऐसे परिवार में, जिसे वह पहले से नहीं जानती थीं। शादी के बाद कुसुम अनजाने घर में चली गईं।

अब उनको ससुराल में लोगों की पसंद-नापसंद और अपनी सोच से तालमेल तो बिठाना ही था, रसोई आदि भी संभालनी थी। उनको वह सारे काम करते होते, जिसे एक साल पहले तक अपनी मां पर टाल देती थी। इससे किताबें कैसे उसके हाथ से दूर होती गईं, उसको खुद भी पता नहीं चला। गुजरे अप्रैल में वह एक बेटी मां भी बन गई हैं।

बकौल कुसुम, ससुराल में कहा गया पढ़कर क्या करोगी? नौकरी हमें करवानी नहीं है। पति बवाना में एक फैक्ट्री मालिक हैं। कमाई इतनी हो जाती है, जिसमें बहू को कमाने की जरूरत नहीं। अब सोचिए, मैंने अपनी पढ़ाई मजबूरी में छोड़ी, जबकि हमारी मरजी पढ़ाई करने की थी। इसका शायद जिंदगी भर मलाल रहेगा। हां, यह सोच रखा है कि अपनी बेटी के साथ वह ऐसा कभी नहीं होने देंगी।

बाल उम्र में शादी, पति निकला शराबी, बोलीं- शब्द नहीं हैं, दर्द बयां करने के... मीरा (बदला हुआ नाम) इन वक्त दिल्ली के एक काउंसलिंग केंद्र में है। मां घरों में काम करती हैं। और पिता मजदूर हैं। वह दिल्ली में पैदा हुई, पली-बढ़ी। परिवार को तंगी से निकालने, आगे बढ़ने के ख्वाब भी सजाए थे। लेकिन कोरोना के कारण लॉकडाउन ने सब कुछ बेपटरी कर दिया। पूरे परिवार को घर जाना पड़ा। माता-पिता के साथ वह भी बिहार के सहरसा स्थित पैतृक गांव चली गईं। उम्र उसकी महज 14 साल थी। घर जाने के कुछ ही दिनों में गांव के ही एक लड़के से उसका विवाह हुआ। दहेज में एक लाख रुपये भी दिए गए। शादी के अगले दिन पता चला कि लड़का नशा करता है। दो हफ्ते में ही उस पर अत्याचार होने लगा। वह इस कदर दहशत में आई कि पिता को ही देखकर डरने लगती है।

बातचीत में उसने कहा, 'मैं अपनी पीड़ा बयां नहीं कर सकती हूँ सर' बस, आपके माध्यम से इतना कह सकती हूँ कि कोई और मेरा जैसा नहीं बनना चाहिए। बहुत दर्द होता है। मैं दीदी (लेडी हार्डिंग मेडिकल कॉलेज में डॉ. प्रेरणा) की तरह डॉक्टर बनना चाहती थी। दीदी मुझे पढ़ा भी रही थीं लेकिन मेरे परिवार ने साथ नहीं दिया सर। इतना बोलने के बाद करीब एक मिनट तक मीरा खामोश रही और फिर उसने फोन रख दिया।

बाल विवाह से जुड़े आंकड़े

- देश में बाल विवाह को रोकने के लिए वर्ष 2006 में बाल विवाह रोकथाम कानून लाया गया था।
- राष्ट्रीय परिवार स्वास्थ्य सर्वेक्षण-5 की हालिया रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, पश्चिम बंगाल में (41.6), बिहार (40.8) और त्रिपुरा (40.1) में बाल विवाह के मामले ज्यादा देखे गए हैं।
- देश की राजधानी दिल्ली के ग्रामीण इलाकों में 11.4 और शहरी क्षेत्र में 9.8 फीसदी है।
- इस सर्वेक्षण में शामिल 20 से 24 वर्ष की महिलाओं में से अधिकतर का विवाह 18 वर्ष की उम्र से पहले हो गया था।

पिछले सालों के मुकाबले यह बाल विवाह के आंकड़ों में कमी आई है। इससे पहले साल 2015-16 की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार दिल्ली के शहरी इलाके में 9.9 और ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में 14.3 फीसदी मामले दर्ज किए गए। 60 फीसदी ज्यादा होती है शिशु मृत्युदर हमारे यहां लड़कियां कम उम्र में मां बनती हैं जिससे कई बार उनकी जान को खतरा भी रहता है और नवजात की मौत की दर भी ज्यादा देखी गई है। बहुत कम लोगों को यह पता होता है कि चिकित्सीय तौर पर वह महिलाएं काफी कमजोर होती हैं जिनका बाल विवाह हुआ होता है और इनमें शिशु मृत्युदर सामान्य महिलाओं की तुलना में 60 फीसदी ज्यादा होता है। 18 वर्ष तक की आयु में शारीरिक तौर पर वह मां बनने लायक होती है लेकिन भावनात्मक और मानसिक तौर पर वो तैयार है कि नहीं ये सबसे जरूरी है। इसलिए 18 से 21 साल आयु बढ़ाना सही फैसला साबित हो सकता है। - डॉ.प्रेरणा वर्मा, प्रसूति रोग विशेषज्ञ, लेडी हार्डिंग मेडिकल कॉलेज

पीएचडी कर बनी गृहिणी लेकिन फैसला मेरा चंचल कड़कड़झूमा में रहती हैं। इस वक्त वह 28 साल की हैं। तीन साल पहले शादी तब हुई, जब उन्होंने अपनी उच्च स्तर की शिक्षा पूरी कर ली थी। वह हैं तो गृहणी, लेकिन फैसला उनका अपना था, और सोच-समझकर लिया गया था। चाहतीं तो वह नौकरी भी कर सकती थीं और आगे भी कैरियर बनाने का रास्ता बंद नहीं है। चंचल बताती हैं, मेरी शादी 21 साल के बाद तब हुई, जब मेरा पोस्ट ग्रेजुएशन पूरा हो गया था। आगे मुझे पीएचडी करनी थी। इसी बीच शादी हो गई। हमने अपने पिता और पति को अपनी इच्छा बताई। दोनों भी इस पर सहमत थे। आज मैं गृहणी हूँ, लेकिन यह फैसला मेरा अपना है और सोच-समझकर लिया है। आज इस काबिल हूँ कि चाहूँ तो कैरियर बना सकती हूँ।

जमीनी स्तर पर बदलाव जरूरी समाज में एक मानसिकता बना दी गई है कि लड़की गौण है। उसके भविष्य के बारे में ज्यादा सोचने की जरूरत नहीं है। वो शादी के बाद अपना भविष्य बना लेगी। लड़की की उम्र बढ़ने के साथ उसके पूरे परिवार का बस एक ही मकसद होता है और वह है शादी। इसी सोच को बदलने के लिए जरूरी है कि देश में न सिर्फ न्यूनतम आयु में बदलाव हो बल्कि इस नियम का जमीनी स्तर पर पूरी सख्ती के साथ पालन होना चाहिए। अगर ऐसा होता है तो बेटियां न गौण रहेगी और न ही मौन। बेटियां पढ़ेगी, बढ़ेगी और स्वस्थ रहते हुए सफलता भी हासिल करेगी। - सोनल कपूर, प्रोत्साहन इंडिया फाउंडेशन, नई दिल्ली

Delhi-based Parikshit Nirbhay has worked as a reporter for IANS News Agency, NavBharat Times and is the senior correspondent of Amar Ujala. He has been awarded multiple reputed national and international awards.

<https://www.amarujala.com/india-news/married-at-21-daughters-will-grow-up-know-how-much-is-right-in-the-opinion-of-experts>



Oppressive and Unjust

“Patriarchy is like the elephant in the room that we don’t talk about, but how could it not affect the planet radically when it’s the superstructure of the society” said Ani Di Franco, American Singer and song maker. So true. While there may be many ways in which it manifests and is perceived, it impacts every choice, every decision and every action of ours. Patriarchy determines which qualities of ours are valuable, what our roles and responsibilities are in society, the power equations between men and women in the social structure, and the rightful entitlements of men and women.

The collection of articles in this section provides a wide-angle view of how patriarchy promotes injustice and is oppressive in nature. The formats used are varied and look at the unconscious and internalized biases, the casual gendering process, and how even new-age technologies are gendered.

Namrata Zakaria presents an insightful take on performance of women in the Olympics games in **‘Bikini bottoms, catsuits, hijabs, unitards—sportswear for women is a political quagmire’** and calls out the inherent sexism in sports with sponsors and organizers being more interested in commodifying women’s bodies rather than recognizing their prowess in a sport. Namrata says ‘Must women sexualize themselves? Yes, but men must say when and how much. Male players, on the other hand, must only play the damn sport. Women must fight patriarchy, misogyny, beauty standards, and then play’. She goes into the double standards, the differences in rewards, and expectations in terms of decency and propriety that pervade women’s sports and flags the issues of transgender persons in sports. Should showing skin be the only way to get spectators, money and visibility to women in sports? Would women sportspersons succeed in their efforts to fight the inherent sexism in sports? These are questions that need to be dwelt into.

Oppression takes many forms, most commonly, and often justified in terms of the beauty standards imposed on women. This is the topic that Mary Joseph tackles in her article titled, **‘Is a dark woman lonely in matters of love?’** as she reports on the online backlash faced by the UN Women’s post on Valentine’s Day on the concept of love for those who don’t fit the conventional standards of beauty.

Ishrat Singh Banwait in his TV news report **‘Jammaan ‘te jeen da farak’** raises a pertinent question, in the context of the euphoria around females outnumbering men in the population of India, should survival be the reason for celebration when women face discrimination at every stage of their lives? Quoting the National Crime Records Bureau data, he highlights the increasing crimes against women in Punjab. As he draws attention to the low conviction rates in rape cases, and the tokenism in the welfare schemes for women. Critiquing the apathy of the public to demand accountability from political parties and the government.

Next, the control over women's reproduction by patriarchy is explored by Maitry Dave's **'Condom v/s copper T who would compromise?'** which is an examination of gender dynamics in the use of contraception, and how over 95% of men in the country do not use condoms. It points out how the burden of the risk of pregnancy and surrounding anxieties is unfairly placed firmly on women, emotionally traumatizing them.

In an interesting and insightful article, Saumya Jyotsna, explores how religion is dominated by men with women priests given secondary positions. **'क्यों पंडिताइन होने की पहचान केवल एक पुरुष पुरोहित की पत्नी होने तक सीमित है?'** chronicles the rise of female priests and the challenges and lack of recognition faced by them. It delves into the myriad of reasons behind their non-acceptance, and the social inertia associated with men traditionally being exclusive practitioners of the profession.

Are the new age technologies gender-neutral? by Malabika Dhar in **'आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस की दुनिया भी महिलाओं को उसी पितृसत्तात्मक नज़रिये से देखती है'** explores how machine-learning-based artificial intelligence can begin generating gendered content as a result of being created primarily by men and using datasets having patriarchal themes. It goes on to examine how critical this issue may prove to be with various industries set to rely heavily on AI and examines the participation of women in STEM, concluding how it may hold the key to a more balanced development of this emerging technology.

Gender stereotypes and roles are introduced in early childhood itself and are reinforced throughout one's life. Elisa Patnaik's, **'Mummy Ki 'Roti' Gol, Papa Ka 'Paisa' Gol'** is the story of her exploration of her daughter's school textbooks through a gender lens and points at a few heartening, as well as glaring content pieces that come to light. It goes on to highlight the critical need for ensuring gender-forward educational content as the norm, and certain interventions that can be put in place to transform the education space.

Patriarchy, which is defined as a rule by a father often denies women who are single parents the right to claim the child as theirs legally. **'Getting a passport for a child is much easier now than it used to be for a single mom'** by Srimati Roy is the chronicle of her experiences in dealing with bureaucratic process engrained with patriarchy in her attempts to get a passport as a single mother in the 1980s. It further details how to date there are various challenges specific to single mothers, some societal and some institutional and how they must be addressed.

Lastly, with **'डायन का डंक : झारखंड से ऐसे जड़ से खत्म होगी डायन कुप्रथा, 'गरिमा' से धीरे-धीरे धुल रहा ये सामाजिक कलंक'**, Guru Swarup Mishra sheds lights on an archaic and draconian practise that is still practised till this date of 'Witch-hunting'. As he details the horrific ways in which women deemed to be witches are treated, and how often times it is used as guise to oppress them and deprive them of their rights.

36. Bikini bottoms, catsuits, hijabs, unitards - Sportswear for women is a political quagmire

Namrata Zakaria | Times of India | November 3rd, 2021



The policing of women's bodies while they play has come to be the essence of women in sports today.

Is it just me or who else thinks this year's sports tournaments are becoming less about sports and more about gender? It is an unusual observation, as ever since the inception of the Olympic games in Athens in 1896, it is the first time that almost half—or 49 per cent—of participating athletes are female. And yet, all the newsmakers in sports this year seem to be women too. In India for example, our only medal so far has been the weightlifter, Mirabai Chanu. The others news-making women are those struggling to hold on to their minds, or often, their skirts.

Despite as many women in sport today as there are men, the gender balance between the two remains skewed. Even though there have been instances of rules (made by men) being rewritten (by men) in a bid to accommodate more women in sports, their governing bodies have not been able to match the alacrity of changing times. To think, hardly a handful of sports offer the same prize money (or even the size of the trophy) to a women's finalist as they do to a men's finalist.

Men love women in sport, this remains true. Except they must look good when performing and dress sexy too.

Norway's beach handball team at the Euro 2021 is battling the governing bodies to wear more conservative outfits, for example. They have been required to wear bikini bottoms, instead of sports shorts like the men do. Despite many protests, they decided to wear shorts

and were punished with a fine of 150 euros each. (Interestingly, musician Pink has offered to pay their fine to show support).

While sportswear is designed to enhance performance, the rule only applies to men's sportswear. For example, male gymnasts wear trackpants or shorts, but women gymnasts wear unitards or catsuits. German gymnast Elisabeth Seitz has stated in an interview, *"If only a little something slips, then everyone sees more than they should see."* Women gymnasts are often performing to win even as the fear of exposing themselves mid-routine is constantly present. On the other hand, a Paralympian from Wales was reprimanded by an official at the English championships a week ago, because her shorts were 'too short'.

In 2018 when French tennis player Alize Cornet removed her t-shirt while on court at the US Open as she had worn it back to front, minutely exposing her sports bra, she was slapped with a code violation. Male tennis stars routinely change their t-shirt in between sets.

In the same year, Serena Williams' post-partum catsuit, that covered her from top to toe, left Roland Garros flummoxed. This resulted in the French Open banning the catsuit on court entirely. The hijab, for example, is permitted in some sports only recently. In 2016, Ibtihaj Muhammed became the first Muslim woman to compete for America wearing a hijab in the Rio Olympics. FIFA had banned the hijab in 2007 and disqualified the Iranian team from playing in the 2012 Olympics for wearing hijabs. They lifted the ban only in 2014 after much backlash. Volleyball federations lifted the hijab ban only in 2016.

Sports bodies penalise women when they show skin, and fine them when they don't. The policing of women's bodies while they play has come to be the essence of women in sports today.

Must women sexualize themselves? Yes, but men must say when and how much. Male players, on the other hand, must only play the damn sport. Women must fight patriarchy, misogyny, beauty standards, and then play.

Sports bodies have often struggled with women's participation. The ancient Olympics was limited to men only. Women participated in the games for the first time in 1900, limiting themselves to lawn tennis and golf. Athletics and gymnastics took another 30 years to come. And the last time a women's event was added was in boxing as late as 2012.

Then there is issue of transgenders. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is realising there is no one way of assessing whether a person is biologically male or female, as biological sex at birth is now a socio-cultural question mark. Formulating rules is becoming complicated for transgender as well as cisgender sports stars.

Two female runners were born female at birth didn't qualify as female for certain races but qualified as female for others. Laurel Hubbard is a trans gender athlete who competed in a

team that matched her gender identity, not her birth gender. Canadian soccer player Quinn, who goes by they/ their, is playing an Olympic team that does not match their gender identity.

The primary way to determine gender is testosterone levels, but studies have shown these are unreliable. In trans women, testosterone-blocking hormone treatment decreases their body mass and muscle significantly. Hyperandrogenism in female athletes such as Dutee Chand and South Africa's Caster Semenya has caused them professional stress for having an unfair advantage too. Now sports bodies are beginning to balance hormones to gender-acceptable levels too. Transgender athletes who identify as men have no restrictions.

Even as the world is recognising a 'third gender' or a 'non-binary' person, sports is struggling to wrap its rules around the new normal. Perhaps governing bodies need to first come up with a come-as-you-are dress code.

Namrata Zakaria is a seasoned writer and editor who has been Senior Editor at Indian Express and Mumbai Mirror, a columnist at Times of India Plus, The Week, and at News9 and also runs a business podcast for Mint newspaper, called 'Tell Me How You Did It'. Her first book, on late fashion designer Wendell Rodricks' Moda Goa museum, is due to be published shortly. Zakaria is the founder of Baradari, a fundraiser that speaks for economic equality between designers and artisans.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/bikini-bottoms-catsuits-hijabs-unitards-sportswear-for-women-is-a-political-quagmire/articleshow/84891851.cms>



37. Is a dark woman lonely in matters of love? (Kannada)

Mary Joseph | Vijay Karnataka | March 5th, 2021

The debate on racism has resurfaced suddenly following an illustration posted on Twitter a week ago by the Women's wing of the United Nations (UN) on Valentine's Day, depicting love in all its diversity.

The illustration showed three couples of various backgrounds holding hands and hugging, as well as a lone black woman hugging herself. It was criticised for featuring a single black woman standing alone. Social media users were quick to point out the problematic nature of the drawing with the resultant backlash forcing the UN to delete the post a day after it was posted.

The illustration draws attention at first sight. It doesn't give scope to any interpretation as it depicts different faces of love. Showing couples from different nations, in different attires, and belonging to different races. With homosexuals given space. It unfolded as love in all its diversity. There was an attractive tagline, which read, 'Love is equality, love is respect, love is Love.'

The illustration sparked outrage on social media as many pointed out that it gave out a message of exclusivity. Social media users protested the hidden message in the illustration, pointing out that black woman was targeted by 'Women'. They termed it as a policy of discrimination, with Twitter flooded with comments from many that felt that the UN promoted anti-blackness.

Social media users made copies of the image before it was deleted following the backlash, with many arguing against the decision to show couples of varying races expressing love with the exception of the black woman.

The UN was quick to correct itself as it didn't want the matter to be blown out of proportion. It quickly withdrew the post uploaded a new gif with multicoloured hearts and the phrase 'love is love' to end the controversy.

However, it is not actually known if the illustration intended racial discrimination.

The UN tendered an apology, clarifying, *"We posted an illustration on Valentine's Day, depicting love in all its diversity. We listened to what you said in the comments & decided to take it down. UN Women works for gender equality & empowerment of all women & girls regardless of age, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation."*

However, many were unwilling to buy the UN version as the arguments and attacks continued 'Does a black lonely woman represent equality' many sought to know. They tweeted saying it wasn't just significant to tender an apology. 'Women' should understand how its post has hurt the sentiments of a large number of people.

"You should say that those whose colour is black are also human beings. We should embrace them. They are also capable of giving love. They too deserve love," many advised 'Women'.

"Separating a black woman from the rest mirrors ground reality regarding black women."

"It is an indication of exclusion. You have disrespected black women."

"You have alienated and promoted singularity. Who actually posted this illustration? The one who posted the illustration tends to believe that many won't be able to understand the intention of targeting a black woman."

These were some of the comments heard on Twitter.

"Interestingly, many backed the illustration saying that the standing image of a black woman actually indicates self and voluntary love. One needs self-love. The illustration symbolically stressed this point and did not intend to hurt anybody," someone said.

Another tweeted, *"The black woman is really strong and hence she loves herself first. The rest all come later."*

"It is not wrong for a black woman to be alone and love herself. A companion is not at all required if she is determined to be happy. Some people exhibit their self-love without any hesitation. People promoting such illustrations should come out of their stupidity regarding love and romance," another user wrote, justifying the 'Women'.

Racial discrimination is nothing new, nor is the movement against it. It often takes its birth in different forms, triggering controversies which die down later.

The brutal murder of 46-year-old Afro-American George Floyd in the US city of Minneapolis is just a new addition to the list of cases of racial discrimination. The murder which propelled the 'Black Matters' campaign successfully made many revolutionary changes. Hindustan Unilever Limited company renamed its premier product from Fair & Lovely to Glow & Lovely. The company's initial advertisement intended that white is beautiful and women should prefer white skin. Renaming was the result of the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign.

'Women' may have apologised and clarified that it did not intend to hurt sentiments, but the illustration is totally unacceptable. Only victims of racial discrimination can understand

what it really means to be black. 'Women' should have been more cautious while dealing with sensitive issues such as race, gender and colour on social media.

Mary Joseph is currently the Junior Assistant Editor with Vijaya Karnataka, presently handling Bangalore city section. She has interviewed multiple prominent personalities and has been writing a column titled HRIDAYASPARSHI since the past five years, primarily covering various topics on women and gender issues.



38. Jamman ‘te jeen da farak (Punjabi)

Ishrat Singh Banwait | Punjab Today - YouTube | November 28th, 2021

A reason to celebrate for India in a long time, as the number of females is higher than that of males. With the National family health survey covering 14 states and UTs revealing that, for every 1000 males, there are 1020 females.

This is a sample survey and the complete picture will be revealed once the 2021 census results are out. Punjab currently has 938 females for every 1000 males, a number which stood at 905 five years ago, according to the same survey. As for the nation, previous to this, the maximum recorded number of females per 1000 males was 972 in the 1901 census. Since then, the numbers have reduced drastically especially till 1961, after which there has been a slight improvement.

While this is a good start, where we are at least letting female births take place but the real issue is whether we are letting them live. In other words, the issue of security for women in the country. As per the 2017 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, Punjab recorded 4620 FIRs related to cases of crime against women. In 2018, the number stood at 5302, in 2019 it was at 5886. The number dropped in 2020 to 4838 but that could have partially been due to the pandemic-induced lockdowns. At the same time, Punjab records the second most cases in the country when it comes to acid attacks.

Speaking of rape cases, what's important to note is that the report reveals that in 99.8% of cases, the rapist is known to the survivor/victim. But it does not end here, we lack deterrence as well. The number of rape cases in which police present a charge sheet in court against the accused is not even 40%. As far as the conviction rate is concerned, it is barely 25% in Punjab.

Political parties gearing for the state assembly elections have included many freebies and schemes for women but none ensure safety. Travel in state buses is now free for women of Punjab, but no steps are taken to prevent their harassment on those buses. One party promised to give Rs 1000/- per month to every adult woman in the state. However, nothing is being done to ensure her safety when she steps out to buy something from a market with that money.

Similarly, a party wants to provide free electricity but no one cares about roads where street lights do not work and pose a risk for women after dark.

It is pertinent to mention a case like the 2012 *Nirbhaya* case, where the whole nation came to the streets and it contributed to the party in power incurring huge political losses. However, nothing much has changed since then. Cases like *Asifa* and the *Unnao* rape cases, among others across the nation, are a testament to the same. The opposition does not forget

to attack the ruling party when a rape case emerges but not a single party mentioned the safety of women in their manifesto.

Lastly, the public at large and the media also do not demand for the same. This is something that must be done via creating public sentiment and resultant pressure on our political parties. Until then, we are only allowing more and more female to take birth but are not allowing them to live a safe life. These statistics are showing us a path, let's hope we will follow it.

Ishrat Singh is a journalist and researcher based out of Mohali, Punjab. He is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the School of Communication Studies in Panjab University, Chandigarh where he is a PhD candidate researching how print media covers rape stories and has four research papers published in peer-reviewed journals. Previously he has worked as a correspondent for The Tribune and for multiple Punjabi and Hindi digital media channels.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyN2UxULOsA>



39. Condom v/s Copper T who should compromise? (Gujrati)

Maitry Dave | Nari Supplements, Sandesh Newspaper | December 7th, 2021

Hearing the word 'condom', many people become enraged. People start looking at each other sheepishly, or awkwardly, or at time in an alarmed manner. Like sex, when this word is spoken in public, people lose their civility. A subject like sex may have been everyone's favorite in the corner of the room but, bringing it up in public or using words like condoms is considered crass our hypocritical society. According to a survey conducted in our country, 95% of Indian men do not use condoms. These 95% of men probably don't appreciate how much trouble, one mistake can create. Some even consider themselves brave for not using condoms. Unfortunately, many arrogant men do not hesitate to say that they have won the war by bravely saying that a casanova does not need a condom, we do not use it. But if we ask the partners of these casanovas, we will know how afraid they are of engaging in sex with them, with many women having to take pills or have abortions due to such stubbornness of their husbands.

Will a woman face trouble by not using a condom because of a man's distaste? After all, pleasure should be the same on both sides.

A woman accepts the desire of a man not to use a condom because of her love. With many men defending themselves saying there were no condoms available at the time. Their argument being why can't the women using a copper T. This is where understanding and consensus is required, as many women face challenges with using copper T. However, in many cases, they are forced to do so, emotionally traumatizing them. This mentality needs to be changed now.

Tie the physical relationship with emotional strings

When a man and woman get emotionally attached and connect in a physical relationship, that moment is very special for them. These periods of intimacy bring them closer and sustain them. A reluctance not to use a condom at such times can create fear and disgust in the mind of the female partner. As if at the time of physical intimacy, if the man does not use contraception, the women is constantly worried that there will be chances of pregnancy, until she gets her period. And if she chooses to swallow an emergency contraceptive to prevent a pregnancy, she has to suffer its side effects. Therefore, instead of making a physical relationship a cause of one's likes and one's dislikes, mutual pleasure and safety should be developed. Why should only women be the ones suffering and compromising in this scenario?

Reasons for not using condoms

The most common reason for not using condoms is that they reduce sexual pleasure. Additionally, many people feel ashamed to go to the medical store and purchase them. In villages, this tendency is common, along with disgust. Moreover, there is the problem of disposal. Men avoid using condoms due to many trivial reasons. With women also being an important factor in lack of adoption and usage of condoms.

Condom or Copper T

There are two types of men who do not use condoms. First is one who is very sensitive towards his partner and chooses to not use condoms because it hurts him or his partner or doesn't suit them. Such men take other precautions and take the women to the gynaecologist on time and give them copper T to avoid conception. While other men do not care about the matter at all. They have sexual intercourse only for their pleasure. After having sex, they don't care about how the woman they have slept deals with preventing a pregnancy.

On the other hand, women who wear copper T can often have problems. Many women are not able to acclimatize to it, and there are many cases where women have been infected by forgetting to remove them when they expire. How one goes about navigating these decisions should be made for safety and well-being of both parties and be fair and sustainable.

Maitry Dave, brings with her nearly ten years of dedicated experience in journalism. She currently works as Sr. Sub Editor at The Sandesh Limited Ahmedabad. She is an alumna of Vardhman Bharti School from where she has obtained her Master in journalism and mass communication.



40. क्यों पंडिताइन होने की पहचान केवल एक पुरुष पुरोहित की पत्नी होने तक सीमित है?

Saumya Jyotsna | www.youthkiawaaz.com | November 14th, 2021



जब हमें बचपन में ककहरा पढ़ाया जाता है, तब 'प' से पंडित पढ़ाया जाता है और किताब में एक पुरुष की ही पूजा-हवन आदि करती हुई एक तस्वीर छपी होती है। यही तस्वीर हम अपने आसपास घर, समाज और मंदिरों में देखते हैं, जिससे हमें यकीन हो जाता है कि एक पुरुष ही पंडित की भूमिका में फिट बैठता है। कुछ समय बाद जब हम थोड़े बड़े होते हैं, तो बोलचाल की भाषा में धोबी-धोबिन, मिश्रा-मिश्राइन, ठाकुर-ठाकुराइन सुनते हैं, जिसके बाद हम भी पंडित-पंडिताइन कर लेते हैं और यही हमारी रोज़मर्रा की भाषा का हिस्सा भी हो जाता है लेकिन हमारे समाज में पंडिताइन शब्द उन महिलाओं के लिए इस्तेमाल किया जाता है, जो किसी पंडित की पत्नी होती हैं।

उनकी पंडिताइन होने की पहचान मात्र एक पत्नी होने तक सीमित हो जाती है। उसका अर्थ कहीं से भी पूजा-पाठ, हवन आदि से नहीं होता है।

एक पितृसत्तात्मक समाज में अधिकांश धार्मिक अनुष्ठान पुरुषों द्वारा ही कराए जाते हैं लेकिन अब महिलाओं ने इस सामाजिक बाधा को तोड़ने का प्रयास शुरू कर दिया है। अब महिलाएं केवल अपने

पति के पंडित होने के कारण पंडिताइन कहलाना पसंद नहीं करती हैं, बल्कि अब कुछ महिलाएं स्वयं पंडित की भूमिका निभा रही हैं।

महिला पुरोहितों ने करवाई दुर्गा पूजा

साल 2021 के दुर्गा पूजा के अवसर पर कोलकाता के 66 पल्ली में चार महिलाएं नंदिनी भौमिक, रूमा रॉय, सीमांती बनर्जी और पॉलोमी चक्रवर्ती ने इतिहास में पहली बार सार्वजनिक दुर्गा पूजा की है। इन चार महिलाओं ने मिलकर शुभमस्तु नामक एक संगठन भी बनाया है, जो धार्मिक और सामाजिक कार्यों में बदलाव लाने के लिए आधुनिक और समकालीन दृष्टि से कार्य करता है।

इनमें से 28 वर्षीय नंदिनी भौमिक ने बताया कि उन्होंने इससे पहले अपनी बेटी की शादी करवाई थी, जिसे लोगों ने अचंभित होकर देखा था। इससे यही साबित होता है कि समाज की नज़रों में पंडितों को लेकर जो तस्वीर बन चुकी है, उसे बदलना कठिन है, क्योंकि कुछ लोग ऐसे भी होते हैं, जो पारंपरिक तरीके में बदलाव पसंद नहीं करते और विरोध करते हैं। वो आगे बताती हैं, *“हम कन्यादान नहीं करते, क्योंकि हम उस प्रथा को मानते ही नहीं हैं, जिसमें महिलाओं को प्रतिगामी वस्तु समझा जाता है। हम अनुष्ठानों को छोटा और सरल रखने की कोशिश करते हैं और पूरे कार्यक्रम को एक घंटे के भीतर पूरा करने का प्रयास करते हैं।”*

साथ ही ये महिला पुरोहितें श्लोक को अंग्रेज़ी में भी पढ़ती हैं ताकि लोग आसानी से समझ सकें।

शादी में महिला पुरोहित का महत्व

साल 2021 में दीया मिर्ज़ा की शादी की तस्वीरें भी याद आती हैं, जिसके आने के बाद ही लोगों के मन में महिला पुरोहितों की एक झलक बनना शुरू हुई थी, उनकी शादी एक महिला पुरोहित शीला अत्ता द्वारा संपन्न हुई थी, जिसे देखकर कुछ फैस ने कमेंट बॉक्स में लिखा था कि इसे असली फेमिनज्म कहते हैं। हालांकि, शीला अत्ता ने ही फिल्ममेकर अनन्या राने की शादी भी करवाई थी। बहरहाल इससे पहले भी राजस्थान में साल 2015 में एक महिला पुरोहित निर्मला सेवानी द्वारा शादी करवाई गई थी। उन्होंने बातचीत में बताया था कि ये उनके द्वारा करवाई जा रही 18वीं शादी है।

क्यों कम है महिला पुरोहितों की संख्या?

हम एक ऐसे समाज में रहते हैं, जहां लोगों को महिलाएं तुलसी चौड़ा में दीया, धूपबत्ती आदि करती हुई पसंद आती हैं। घर में कोई भी पर्व त्यौहार हो, महिलाओं से ही अपेक्षा की जाती है कि वे सज संवरकर पूजन आदि करें लेकिन महिलाओं को लोग पुरोहित की छवि में नहीं देखना चाहते।

यहां तक कि आज भी जब लोग लड़कियों को परखते हैं, तब भी उनसे उम्मीद की जाती है कि वे श्लोक, मंत्र आदि की जानकारी रखें।

महिला पुरोहितों की संख्या कम होने के पीछे अनेक कारण हैं



प्रतीकात्मक तस्वीर। फोटो साभार- Flickr

सबसे पहला कारण है पीरियड्स का होना। हर महीने होने वाले पीरियड्स के कारण ऐसे भी महिलाएं पूजा-पाठ से दूर रहती हैं, क्योंकि हमारे समाज में इस समय महिलाएं अपवित्र रहती हैं। जब समाज महिलाओं को ही अपवित्र मानेगा, तब उससे पूजा-पाठ जैसे पवित्र माने जाने वाले अनुष्ठानों को करवाने के बारे में सोचना ही गलत हो जाता है। हालांकि इसके पीछे अब वैज्ञानिक तर्क दिए जा रहे हैं कि महिलाओं को पीरियड्स के दौरान आराम की ज़रूरत होती है और मंत्रोच्चार करने से शरीर पर दबाव बढ़ता है। ऐसे में महिलाएं पूजा-पाठ से दूर ही रहे तो बेहतर हैं। जबकि महिलाओं में पीरियड्स होना एक स्वाभाविक एवं सकारात्मक गतिविधि है और इसे धार्मिक अनुष्ठानों में भाग लेने के लिए बाधा के तौर पर नहीं देखा जाना चाहिए।

दूसरा, जब महिलाओं के ही कंधे पर पूरे घर की बागडोर रहती है, तब महिलाएं घर से बाहर निकलकर पूजा-पाठ कैसे करवाएंगी? आमतौर पर किसी भी पर्व-त्यौहार के आने पर किचन की सारी ज़िम्मेदारी महिलाओं पर ही रहती है। महिलाओं के हिस्से में त्यौहार तो आता है लेकिन अपने साथ किचन समेत घर के कामों को लेकर आता है। ऐसे में महिलाएं घर से बाहर निकल किसी अनुष्ठान में भाग ले सकेंगी? ये असंभव लगता है।

शिक्षा का स्तर

राष्ट्रीय सांख्यिकी कार्यालय (एनएसओ) के आंकड़ों पर आधारित एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भारत में साक्षरता दर 77.7 प्रतिशत है। इस रिपोर्ट के अनुसार ग्रामीण इलाकों की साक्षरता दर 73.5 प्रतिशत जबकि शहरी इलाके में 87.7 प्रतिशत है। इस रिपोर्ट को जुलाई 2017 से जून 2018 के आंकड़ों के आधार पर तैयार किया गया है, जो सात या सात साल से अधिक उम्र के व्यक्तियों के मध्य राज्यवार साक्षरता दर के बारे में बताती है। राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर पुरुषों की साक्षरता दर 84.7 प्रतिशत, जबकि महिलाओं की साक्षरता दर मात्र 70.3 प्रतिशत है। इस रिपोर्ट से ही साफ पता चलता है कि देश में पुरुष साक्षरता दर महिलाओं की अपेक्षा ज़्यादा बेहतर है।

जब महिलाएं शिक्षित ही नहीं होंगी, तब पौराणिक किताबों और धार्मिक किताबों को पढ़ ही नहीं पाएंगी और पूजा-पाठ में मंत्रों का होना अनिवार्य होता है।

हालांकि इन सब कारणों के अलावा भी अन्य कई कारण हैं, जिसने लोगों को जकड़ कर रखा है। जैसे मंदिरों का राजनीतिकरण होना! जिस कारण भी महिलाएं अपने कदम पीछे खींच लेती हैं।

महिलाओं द्वारा नहीं पहुंचता ईश्वर तक संदेश

साल 2021 के दुर्गा-पूजा के अवसर पर पूजा-पंडालों में घूमने का अवसर मिला, तब हर पूजन-पंडाल में केवल पुरुष ही पुरोहित की भूमिका निभा रहे थे।

महिला पुरोहितों को शामिल करने पर जब मैंने सवाल किए, तब वहां मौजूद कुछ लोगों ने बताया कि महिलाओं द्वारा की गई पूजा ईश्वर तक नहीं पहुंचती है और अगर कुछ लोग दिखावे के लिए महिलाओं से पूजा करवाते हैं, तो उन्हें भी बाद में पुरुष पुरोहितों से पूजा करवानी चाहिए, क्योंकि तब ही ईश्वर तक संदेश पहुंचता है और पूजा सफल होती है।

क्या है विशेषज्ञ की राय?

धर्म विशेषज्ञ वसुधा नारायणन इस परिप्रेक्ष्य में लिखा है कि यजमान और पुरोहित के बीच जान-पहचान का रिश्ता माना जाता है। कई कर्मकांडों के दौरान पुरोहित अपने यजमान की कलाई में पवित्र धागा बांधते हैं। अगर पूजा में महिला भी शामिल होती है, तो उसकी कलाई पर धागा उसका पति ही बांधता है। धागा बांधने की क्रिया को दो लोगों को कर्मकांड के स्तर पर जोड़ने का ज़रिया माना जाता है। लिहाजा यह तर्क दिया जाता है कि महिला पुरोहित अपने पति के सिवाय किसी भी पुरुष की कलाई पर धागा नहीं बांध सकती है। इसके अलावा रुढ़िवादी हिंदुओं को इससे जुड़ा आर्थिक पहलू भी परेशान करता है।

वसुधा आगे कहती हैं, *“मान्यता है कि एक महिला अपनी सेवा के बदले पुरुष से भुगतान नहीं ले सकती है।”* हालांकि पूजा के लिए फूल तोड़ने, साफ-सफाई करने, प्रसाद तैयार करने और पूजा स्थल तैयार करने वाली एक महिला ही होती है। ये सारा काम महिलाओं के ही जिम्मे आता है लेकिन महिला अगर पूजन करवाए तो पूजा सफल नहीं मानी जाती है। वैसे तो आजकल जेंडर न्युट्रल शब्द की काफी चर्चा हो रही है लेकिन अभी लोगों के मन से जेंडरवादी होने का ठप्पा नहीं हटा है, क्योंकि जो शब्द आम-बोलचाल की भाषा का हिस्सा बन चुके हैं, उनसे अलग होने में समय लगना लाज़मी है।

Saumya Jyotsna is from Muzaffarpur Bihar. A post graduate from Zoology and Mass Communication. She has been writing since 2018. She has received UNFPA Laadli Media Award in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

<https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2021/11/why-the-identity-of-being-a-priest-is-limited-to-being-the-wife-of-a-male-priest-only-hindi-article/>



41. आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस की दुनिया भी महिलाओं को उसी पितृसत्तात्मक नज़रिये से देखती है

Malabika Dhar | www.feminisminindia.com | May 5th, 2021



क्या आपको कोई ऐसी घटना याद है जब आप थककर घर आए हो और अपने मां की जगह पिता या भाई को पानी पिलाने या भूख लगने पर अपने पिता को कुछ पकाकर खिलाने का आग्रह किया हो। स्वाभाविक और प्राकृतिक रूप में मानव दिमाग का पिता या भाई के बदले अपनी मां या बहन को इन घरेलू कामों के लिए आदेश देना पितृसत्ता से जन्मी मानसिकता का परिणाम है। हालांकि, महिलाओं के प्रति यह सोच सिर्फ हमारे घरों तक ही सीमित नहीं है। ऐसी ही सोच के कारण कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता या आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस (AI) का इस्तेमाल कर ऐसे वर्चुअल असिस्टेंट या ह्यूमनॉइड यानी मानव रूपी रोबोट का आविष्कार हो रहा है, जो महिलाओं की आवाज़ और उनके स्वरूप को उन कामों के लिए अपना रहे हैं जिनका दायरा पितृसत्तात्मक समाज ने पहले से ही तय कर रखा है। यह बात हैरान करने वाली ज़रूर है क्योंकि आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस का कोई जेंडर नहीं होता लेकिन आज अलग-अलग शोध और रिपोर्ट इस प्रवृत्ति की गवाह दे रहे हैं।

आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस की दुनिया में भी पुरुषों के बोलबाले के कारण जिन कामों में सौहार्द, धैर्य, कोमलता या शिष्टाचार की उम्मीद की जाती है, उन्हें महिलाओं से जोड़ लेने में सहूलियत होती है। महिलाओं के प्रति यह पूर्वाग्रह और AI की दुनिया में महिलाओं का अस्वाभाविक रूप से कम संख्या में नेतृत्व करना आने वाले दिनों में खतरनाक साबित हो सकता है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र शैक्षिक वैज्ञानिक

और सांस्कृतिक संगठन (UNESCO) के मुताबिक एआई सिस्टम के डिज़ाइन, विकास और परिनियोजन में महिलाओं का भाग लेना और नेतृत्व करना आज बेहद ज़रूरी हो गया है। UNESCO के अनुसार साक्ष्यों से पता चलता है कि साल 2022 तक, महिलाओं के प्रति इस पूर्वाग्रह के वजह से एआई परियोजनाएं 85 फीसद तक गलत परिणाम दे सकती हैं।

ह्यूमनॉइड रोबोट अलग-अलग तकनीक के माध्यम से संचालित एक पूरी तरह स्वायत्त या आंशिक रूप से स्वायत्त मशीन है जो अपने आस-पास के माहौल के अनुरूप बातचीत या व्यवहार करने में योग्य होता है। यह मनुष्य के आकार का हो सकता है या एक मनुष्य की तरह भी हो सकता है। ऐपल के आईफोन की सहायक सिरी, ऐमजॉन की अलेक्सा, पहली रोबोट नागरिक सोफिया से लेकर जापान की पहली रोबोट होटल कर्मचारी आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस का महिलाओं की आवाज़ और उनके स्वरूप को अपनाने के पीछे यह धारणा काम करती है कि जिन कामों को ये कर रही हैं, वे पुरुषों के लिए नहीं हैं। साल 2016 में, माइक्रोसॉफ्ट द्वारा 'थिंकिंग अबउट यू, टीएवाई नामक एक चैटबॉट बनाया गया था जो 19 वर्षीय अमरीकी किशोरी की ट्वीटिंग शैली की तरह बातचीत करने में सक्षम थी। इसने लाखों ऑनलाइन ट्विटर यूज़र्स से ट्वीट करना भी सीखा था। महिलाओं को जिन रूपों में यहां दिखाने का चलन बन गया है, उस अवधारणा का गठन दिन पर दिन हमारे पितृसत्तात्मक समाज में होता है। यह ध्यान देने वाली बात है कि एआई के क्षेत्र में पुरुष वर्चस्व होने के कारण जब कृत्रिम बुद्धिमत्ता और इंसानों की तरह दिखने या काम करने के लिए बनाए जाने वाले रोबोट तैयार किए जाते हैं, तो मशीनें पारंपरिक रूप से महिलाओं द्वारा किए जाने वाले काम का ही प्रदर्शन करती हैं। मसलन कई रोबोट को हाउस हेल्प, व्यक्तिगत सहायकों, होटल की वेट्रेस या संग्रहालय की गाइड के रूप में कार्य करने के लिए डिज़ाइन किए गए हैं।

इस अंतरराष्ट्रीय महिला दिवस पर यूनेस्को और वर्ल्ड इकोनॉमिक फ़ोरम ने 'गर्ल टूबल: ब्रेकिंग थू द बायस इन एआई' के नाम से एक सम्मेलन किया जिसमें इस बात पर चिंता व्यक्त की गई कि आज एआई की दुनिया में महिला एआई विशेषज्ञ खोजने के बावजूद मिल नहीं रही हैं। एआई और डेटा साइंस की नौकरी के लिए नियुक्ति करने वाली कंपनियां बताती हैं कि उन्हें मिलने वाले आवेदनों में से एक फीसद से भी कम महिलाओं के आवेदन होते हैं। यूनेस्को के अनुसार पुरुषों के तुलना में महिलाओं और लड़कियों को कंप्यूटर को प्रोग्राम करने के बारे में जानने की संभावना 4 गुना कम है। महिलाओं का प्रौद्योगिकी में पेटेंट के लिए आवेदन करने की संभावना पुरुषों के तुलना में 13 फीसद कम है। वैश्विक स्तर पर महिलाओं का टेक कंपनियों में नेतृत्व के पदों पर बने रहने की संभावना भी कम है। एआई किसी भी बौद्धिक कार्य के लिए उपयोगी हो सकता है। एआई का प्रयोग स्वायत्त वाहन जैसे ड्रोन या सेल्फ-ड्राइविंग कार, मेडिकल डायग्नोसिस, गणित के थिऑरम साबित करना, शतरंज खेलना, गूगल सर्च जैसे सर्च इंजन, सिरी जैसे ऑनलाइन सहायक और चेहरे की पहचान जैसे कार्यों में हो सकता है। आज एआई तस्वीरों की पहचान, पैम फिल्टरिंग, हवाई उड़ान की देरी की भविष्यवाणी, ऑनलाइन विज्ञापनों को लक्षित करने जैसे कामों में मददगार साबित हो रहा है। हालांकि एआई के संभावित खतरे भी हैं जिनपर चर्चा होती आई है।

यह पितृसत्तात्मक समाज की विडंबना ही है कि समाज के लिए महिलाओं का एआई से जुड़ा होना सिर्फ कल्पनात्मक ही होते हैं। उदाहरण के लिए, अंग्रेज़ी फिल्म 'Her' में एक कृत्रिम बुद्धिमान

ऑपरेटिंग सिस्टम सैमंथा को दिखाया जाता है। फिल्म में इसे अभिनेत्रियों के लिए मौजूदा छवि जैसे आकर्षक या सुंदर दिखने के प्रतिमान को पूरा करने के लिए इसे अभिनेत्री स्कारलेट जोहानसन की मनमोहक आवाज में प्रस्तुत किया गया था। इसके विपरीत उसके मालिक की भूमिका में अभिनेता जोआकिन फीनिक्स को आखिरकार इस रोबोट से प्यार हो जाता है। यूनेस्को के कई आलोचक एआई पर पक्षपाती डेटा-सेट से चलने के आरोप पर ज़ोर दे रही हैं। आलोचकों का मानना है कि इस प्रवृत्ति से हमारे समाज की मौजूदा महिला-विरोधी पूर्वाग्रह और बढ़ रहे हैं। साथ ही एआई में महिलाओं के लिए यह रूढ़िवादी मानसिकता उन्हीं के खिलाफ कट्टरपंथी को और पुख्ता कर रही है।

यूनेस्को के अनुसार विश्व स्तर पर केवल 22 फीसद महिलाएं एआई के क्षेत्र में नौकरियां कर रही हैं। लोग अपने स्वयं के पूर्वाग्रह के चश्मे से इन एआई यंत्रों या व्यक्तित्वों को देखते हैं। चूंकि ये रूढ़िवादिता समाज के किसी एक वर्ग या लिंग तक सीमित नहीं, इसलिए चाहे सेवा भूमिका हो, किसी साथी या सहायक की भूमिका हो या सिर्फ आवाज़ की बुनियाद पर विश्वास की भावना को कायम करने की बात हो, उपभोक्ताओं के लिए एआई के किसी महिला स्वरूप या व्यक्तित्व को अपनाना ज्यादा आसान होता है। एआई को मुख्यधारा से जोड़कर लोकप्रिय और आम जीवन का हिस्सा बनाने का उद्देश्य रखने वाली टेक कॉम्पनियों को इस समस्या से कोई आपत्ति नहीं होती। यूनेस्को की साल 2019 की रिपोर्ट 'आई वुड ब्लश इफ आई कुड: क्लोजिंग जेन्डर दिवाइड्स इन डिजिटल स्किल्स थ्रू एजुकेशन' बताती है कि आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस स्पष्ट रूप से लैंगिक पक्षपात करती है। रिपोर्ट में यह बताया गया कि एआई डेटा सेट और विशेष कर प्रशिक्षण के लिए प्रयुक्त किए जाने वाले डेटा सेट लैंगिक रूढ़िवाद पर आधारित होते हैं। रिपोर्ट इस बात पर जोर देती है कि एल्गोरिदम और उपकरणों में हानिकारक लैंगिक रूढ़ियों को फैलाने और उन्हें मजबूत करने की क्षमता है। ये लैंगिक पक्षपात वैश्विक स्तर पर महिलाओं को हाशिए पर जीने का खतरा पैदा करती हैं।

आज एआई की बढ़ती लोकप्रियता के कारण इस तरह के पूर्वाग्रह महिलाओं को आर्थिक, राजनीतिक और सामाजिक जीवन के क्षेत्रों में भी पीछे छोड़ सकती है। एआई में व्याप्त लैंगिक रूढ़िवाद किस तरह नकारात्मक परिणाम दे सकते हैं, इस बात की गहराई को मैं अपने जीवन की एक घटना से समझाना चाहूंगी। बांग्ला भाषा में क्रिया का प्रयोग बिना 'लिंग' को दर्शाये किया जा सकता है। जब कुछ बांग्ला वाक्यों को मैंने गूगल ट्रांसलेशन में अनुवाद किया तो, वहां महिलाओं के लिए निर्धारित रूढ़िवाद के अनुसार ही परिणाम दिए। जैसे, बांग्ला में 'शे सुनदोर' को 'She is beautiful', 'शे रोजगार कोरे' को 'He earns', 'शे रात्रा कोरे' को 'She is cooking', 'शे गारी चालाए' को 'He is driving'। इसी तरह अन्य वाक्यों में अनुवाद का परिणाम भी एआई में मौजूद अवधारणाओं पर आधारित मिला। गूगल जैसे विश्वसनीय सर्व इंजन पर करोड़ों लोग निर्भर करते हैं। ऐसे में, इस तरह के परिणाम किसी भी साधारण व्यक्ति के संकीर्ण सोच का कारण बन सकती है।

आज विज्ञान तेजी से प्रगति कर रहा है। आने वाले दिनों में भारत में एआई का प्रयोग सुरक्षा, उत्पाद, चिकित्सा से लेकर आम जीवन में और अधिक होने की संभावना है। इस पूर्वाग्रह का अधिक प्रचलित होने का एक अहम कारण विज्ञान, प्रौद्योगिकी, इंजीनियरिंग और गणित (स्टेम) से संबंधित क्षेत्रों में

महिलाओं का कम प्रतिनिधित्व है। वर्ल्ड इकनॉमिक फोरम के अनुसार दुनिया भर के शोधकर्ताओं में औसतन महज 30 फीसद महिलाएं हैं। विश्व में पुरुषों की तुलना में एक तिहाई से भी कम छात्रा गणित और इंजीनियरिंग जैसे विषयों में उच्च शिक्षा प्राप्त करती हैं। जहां 49.8 फीसद पुरुष स्टेम में स्नातक कर इस क्षेत्र में नौकरी कर रहे हैं, वहीं सिर्फ 12.4 फीसद महिलाएं इस क्षेत्र में स्नातक कर नौकरियां कर रही हैं। स्टेम के क्षेत्रों में काम करने वाली महिलाओं को अकसर कम ख्याति प्राप्त होती है। साथ ही, समान काम के लिए पुरुषों के तुलना में कम वेतन प्राप्त करती हैं। सतत विकास लक्ष्यों तक पहुंचने के लिए किसी भी देश का विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में लैंगिक समानता के चुनौती को पार करना महत्वपूर्ण है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र के अनुसार पिछले कुछ वर्षों में महिलाओं और लड़कियों को तकनीकी क्षेत्रों में अध्ययन और काम के बढ़ावे के लिए की गए प्रयासों के बावजूद इस क्षेत्र में आज भी महिलाओं की सहभागिता बहुत कम है। आज आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस की दुनिया में मौजूद महिलाओं के लिए पूर्वाग्रहों को दूर करने की ज़रूरत है ताकि इसके अंतर्गत बनाए जाने वाली मशीनें, रोबोट्स और डेटा सेट भी रूढ़िवादी सोच से मुक्त हो। विज्ञान पर निर्भर होते इस दुनिया में वैश्विक स्तर पर तकनीकी भूमिका और प्रौद्योगिकी के क्षेत्र में महिलाओं का नेतृत्व परम आवश्यक है।

Malabika Dhar has worked with print and audiovisual mediums in both Hindi and English language. She started her career in journalism with 'Aaj Tak' in 2010 and has worked for 'The Pioneer' and 'News Avenue'. She has been working as a Staff Writer with Feminism in India, Hindi since 2020. She has also served as the Vice Principal in a low-income private school named 'Path Bhawan' in Bihar from 2013 to 2019 and is passionate about working towards educational and gender equality.

<https://hindi.feminisminindia.com/2021/05/05/artificial-intelligence-and-patriarchy-women-hindi/>



42. Mummy ki ‘roti’ gol, papa ka ‘paisa’ gol

Elisa Patnaik | www.odishabytes.com | December 21st, 2021

My son as a four-year-old used to regale us with a popular Hindi poem, ‘Mummy ki Roti gol, gol, Papa ka Paisa gol gol.’ Not discounting his endearing recital, I always used to be a trifle annoyed at the stereotyping of Mummy’s ‘Roti’ and Papa’s ‘Paisa.’ The other circular references in the poem insinuating gender typecasts included – ‘Dadi ki Bindi’, ‘Didi ka Kangan’ as compared to ‘Dada’s Chasma’ and ‘Bhaiya’s Ghadi’.

I was hoping, as compared to a few years ago when conventional gender portrayal was rampant in school textbooks and curriculum, it would have advanced to a positive and progressive representation. But I was both disappointed and perturbed as it was not to be. While a few schools and national publications have attempted to disrupt this course, the majority continue with its propagation.

So, the Engineer, Banker, Doctor, Police personnel is always a man and a Teacher, Nurse, Artist is always woman; The mother is always seen in the kitchen, serving family members, or taking care of a sick person while the father is seen reading a newspaper, sipping a cup of tea, or returning from office. The images and pictures normalize males doing physical work, as breadwinners of the house, and operating outside the house and women doing softer tasks confined to the domestic space.

History, Civics and Social Studies’ textbooks continue with the marginalisation of women with misrepresentation or no representation of female personalities and characters in occupations, India’s freedom struggle, social reformers etc. in both texts as well as illustrations. The overall portrayal of girls and women is largely through caring and gentler roles defined in relation to men, as a daughter, sister, wife and restricted to the house. The curricula reinforce the stereotypical image that men dominate the public sphere and women the private sphere.

But what clearly takes the cake is the outrageous, regressive, and misogynist comprehension passage in the recent Class X CBSE English exam. The passage contained statements such as ‘*women gaining independence is the main reason for a wide variety of social and family problems*’ and ‘*wives stopped obeying their husbands and that is the main reason children and servants are indisciplined*.’ This is the year 2021 mind you, and the exam paper has been set for impressionable 16-year-olds on the verge of beginning a new phase of their lives as young adults.

Gender stereotyping and fallacious notions about the gendered division of labour are among the earliest things we impart to our children in our homes and families directly and indirectly. It gets further influenced when they start attending schools and subsequent educational institutes later. And by the time the education is complete, these notions and

norms establish strongly in their minds which they unconsciously confirm to in their own lives. Educational content reinforces traditional gender norms, labour stereotypes not only perpetuate conservative notions about women but also undermine their contribution leading to sexism that sees women as just mothers, wives, sisters, and unpaid, low-status workers. We have all seen how the education system, textbooks and other study materials stereotype gender roles and often overlook the contributions of women thus propagating the existing gender bias and typecasts. Young children in their formative years are moulded by the cast of gender stereotypes and biases from their early childhood which gets reinforced with such repeated exposure in schools and through study materials.

Education plays a vital role in shaping ideas, thoughts, and beliefs among young impressionable minds. And schools are the foundation, which forms the first notions about gender, gender socialisation, equality, and inclusivity. They are also an important medium of internalising gender roles and stereotypes directly and indirectly. The mind of a child is still immature to question the established norms and they tend to adopt what they see making these gender roles look normal. By validating the prescribed ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ social and behavioural norms, stereotypes, and roles, we constrict their minds instead of truly enlightening them. Textbooks not only follow gender stereotypes but also reflect the existing patriarchy. Boys and men are shown as active participants engaged in physical activities while girls and women are depicted as passive members more involved in their nurturing and supporting role. Female characters in stories are represented in traditional and secondary roles and male characters as heroes and saviours.

The trend is seen not just in the language, illustrations, and pictures but also in the examples given. For instance, in maths examples, the boys buy toy cars, bats and balls, but girls always buy bangles or dolls. The mother is always seen buying vegetables and groceries walking while the father is seen commuting to his office in a two/four-wheeler. In addition, the invisible and unpaid domestic work done by women goes completely unrecognised in the textbooks. Worse, some of the content degrades women as well. Textbook content on ‘*ideal female figures*,’ comparing a woman ‘*to a donkey*,’ justification of ‘*dowry for ugly and handicapped girls*’ have been reported in some of the school textbooks.

The few gender audits of textbooks undertaken in both government and private schools have brought to light such glaring instances of gender stereotypes and depiction of existing conventional power and social structures. And it’s not just the curriculum but also the teachers who deliver the content which also fortifies the prevalent biases. In classrooms, teachers sometimes perpetuate the dominant notion that boys understand and prefer science, technology, mathematics, and sports better, whereas girls like and perform better in humanities and arts.

A 2020 UNESCO report titled ‘The Education of Girls in Asia and the Pacific,’ explains how curricula and materials reinforce these gender stereotypes. It says that women and girls are grossly under-represented in school textbooks across the globe – including India – and when included in the narrative, are largely depicted in traditional and stereotyped

roles. It points out that ‘strength, stamina, and intelligence,’ were qualities that were largely ascribed to, and celebrated in, men, while traits like being ‘understanding and kind’ were celebrated in women. Showing women in voluntary roles and men in paid jobs, are among the gender stereotypes mentioned in the report. Interestingly, the Report takes note of attempts by few countries to revise textbook images to reflect gender balance, including the revision of many textbook images to remove gender stereotypes by the Maharashtra State Bureau of Textbook Production and Curriculum Research in 2019. The Grade 2 textbooks for example, now show men and women sharing household chores, along with a female doctor and a male chef and the students asked to note these images and talk about them.

A few institutions and governments are now proactively coming forward to herald this change. Such as the Government of Kerala which has now taken a decision to go for gender audit of textbooks from pre-primary to the university level and revise them as required.

I was pleasantly surprised seeing some progressive and equitable gender representations in my daughter’s Class 5 text books. In a science chapter on ‘Safety and First Aid,’ the picture of a boy cutting vegetables with a knife and a girl plugging a plug were refreshing changes. And so was a female shopkeeper and a boy rolling *chappatis* while explaining force can change the shape of an object. There were women doctors and scientists too. Although such steps on gender-sensitive education is welcome, a lot more needs to be done. Besides regular gender audits to make course corrections and training of teachers on gender-sensitive teaching, sensitisation workshops with both male female students and teachers together will help dispel norms, redefine conventional notions of gender and also create an equitable ecosystem in the educational institutes.

So hopefully, the poem will be revised to Papa’s *Rotis* and Mummy’s *Paisa* soon!

Elisa Patnaik is a Development Communications specialist with nearly 18 years of experience working in the media and the development sector. A post-graduate in Economics from the University of Hyderabad and an alumna of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) she has worked with several organisations including ‘odishabytes.com’, ‘The Asian Age,’ ‘Times of India’, BBC Media Action and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

<https://odishabytes.com/mummy-ki-roti-gol-papa-ka-paisa-gol/>



43. Getting a passport for a child is much easier now than it used to be for a single mom

Srimati Roy | www.telegraphindia.com | May 5th, 2021



‘I recall feeling lost in the eighties when securing a passport for the baby was arguably the first challenge in the Indian single parenting obstacle course.’

In our sweet home, there has been a life-affirming hum of the new school session. Crisp textbooks, scattered art supplies and the buzz of pre-teens fangirling about favourite teachers. There is a continuous sense of wonder at watching young life bud a little more, daily.

And yet, April lived up to its promise of being the cruellest month. Terror and trauma closed in on each of us, besieging us even after a year of being around. ‘Everyday fortitude despite weakening will’ is how I described my mood to a coupled colleague. She had been stunned into a dystopia of caregiving with her partner knocked out with a heavy viral load. An experience that can be #CoupleGoals, perhaps even create greater togetherness.

Single moms posted check-ins last fortnight to group hug (using GIFs and emojis). We overshaed resources as concerns of mortality overtook all other chatter. We know that when it’s down to the wire, it’s up to us to plan for contingencies, carry through, and take charge. Between verifying trails for plasma and amplifying cries for oxygen, we promised each other that ‘we are all in this together’.

Community gives courage. Community gives comfort.

I recall feeling lost in the eighties when securing a passport for the baby was arguably the first challenge in the league of the Indian single parenting obstacle course. This was in the fledgling days of social media when people's updates swung from 'Committed' on Orkut to 'It's complicated' on Facebook. Twitter was around but by and large people did not outrage — or live — on social media. Peer-to-peer reviews of systems and processes were not available and the Internet was of limited help.

As far as the juggernaut of government went, we knew that things had to be textbook perfect, solid, and normal. Father's details followed by mother's details, all living in a shared address, worked as introductions as it were, of the little citizen to the paperwork of enfranchisement. Married couples typically shared the same surname in order to even apply for a passport for their offspring.

Otherwise, we were told, *"How will they know that a woman with a surname different from her kiddie co-travellers is just a mother who has kept her maiden name? Yaarki naaki, what sort of family is this, hyaan, with different last names and travelling separately?"*

Women would actually straighten out their documentation, align surnames, and reissue their own passports and then proceed. Exhausting.

How do you account for your messy situation in this time-trusted framework?

Like in the first year of the pandemic, many of us don't know in the first years of sudden singledom what exactly we are dealing with — whether things will escalate, defuse or stay at the same place. Or rather, how rapidly any of these shifts will happen.

Having been refused a signature or an NOC by the other parent, I made a total of three chakkars of the dusty passport office, then housed in picturesque Dalhousie. Inside the building, my application and I moved from table to table, narrating the same backstory a few times. Ageing *bhodroloks* who could not find a way around the existing system finally settled on a solution. A legal affidavit declaring me as a single parent was annexed and the bub had her coveted blue book soon after. I had to do a fair bit of running around, but I remember never feeling heckled by officials. They were just doing their job within the construct of unchanging policies.

Five years later, during the first renewal, the system changed. Society had changed a bit, the other parent had changed a bit and given consent. The RPO was now privatised, digitalised, managed by young people. They spotted an address mismatch. Not to worry, an officer in pink linen assured me. A police verification was called for. This too happened uneventfully, in under a week, and efficiently. The cops actually called ahead of their visit. Very courteous and most supportive.

Another five years and it was time for another renewal. New changes in December 2016 announced by the Ministry of External Affairs recommended the use of a ready-made format, Annexure C. This enabled a single parent — mother or father or a legal guardian — to make the application without consent from the other parent. So, this was a godsend. This was game-changing.

The matter of fathers' consent and objection is crucial to understand how the system forces the role of permission-seeking on single moms. Interestingly, the same role does not apply to single dads. If you flipped the scenario, mothers' permissions were unnecessary, dispensable. This cuts across several portals, not just the former doorways of passport offices. And not just for policies concerning minors.

If you are an adult woman, ever travelled abroad solo and needed to furnish an NOC to secure your visa? Tell me it did not put a cramp in your free style! Wondered whether men belonged to their mothers and wives the way you are supposed to be spoken for by your father or husband?

Seeking consent or no objection implies communication. Often between parties who have devolved to a high conflict, lose-lose approach. You also may not know how to reach this person any more. They may abuse the power of the veto. Even if you overcome all other constraints, the difficulty of imploring an absent parent to show up, however symbolic, remains.

Would you want to seek permission from somebody who abused you? Get in touch with somebody you would rather forget? Have to give explanations to somebody who left you holding the baby? Hence, the passport application systemic overhaul may have taken 10 years as far as I was concerned, but it was definitely not too little, too late. It's easy now, as all such things should be. However, the need for more ease, for greater understanding continues as larger society is still judgmental.

A day after t2 carried the first column in this series, my social feeds reverberated with news of a single mom of a seven-year-old in progressive Kerala. She was disciplined by her neighbours for coming home late from work. They had locked her out of her gated complex. Police intervention in the early hours of the morning enabled her to enter her apartment. The aggrieved lady took to Facebook to protest this discrimination although I am yet to see a play up in big media.

Does this bother you? Would any demographic other than a single woman or a single mom face this? Do you think a single dad would face the same situation? Would a married woman? Would any man?

The truth is, nobody should have to go through this. And yet, because we do, we have to seek out our own and form a tribe from scratch. Community is hard-won, but it is bonded

by common traumas, shared struggles, and similar goals. Till we can put the two back together, this is who we resonate with when we say 'We Are All in This Together'.

Srimati Roy is an entrepreneur with a marketing consultancy, Radical MCM, and over 17 years of experience as a consumer marketer across organizations such as FCB Ulka, MindShare, L'Oreal India, ABP Pvt Ltd, BCCL and Viacom 18 Media Pvt Ltd.

<https://www.telegraphindia.com/culture/getting-a-passport-for-a-child-is-much-easier-now-than-it-used-to-be-for-a-single-mom/cid/1814592>



44. डायन का डंक : झारखंड से ऐसे जड़ से खत्म होगी डायन कुप्रथा, 'गरिमा' से धीरे-धीरे धुल रहा ये सामाजिक कलंक

Guru Swarup Mishra | www.prabhatkhabhar.com | December 31st, 2021

रांची: झारखंड में डायन-बिसाही के शक में कई महिलाओं की जिंदगी नर्क बन गयी। कई महिलाओं को बेइंतहा जुल्म सहने पड़े। महिलाओं की हत्या तक कर दी गयी। अशिक्षा के कारण अंधविश्वास की जड़ें इतनी गहरी हो गयी हैं कि डायन कुप्रथा के कारण महिलाओं का जीना मुहाल हो गया है। इस पर रोक के लिए कानून है, लेकिन इसका सख्ती से पालन नहीं होता। झारखंड की हेमंत सोरेन सरकार द्वारा डायन कुप्रथा उन्मूलन के लिए गरिमा परियोजना चलायी जा रही है। इसके जरिए पीड़ितों को चिन्हित कर उन्हें सखी मंडल से जोड़कर स्वावलंबी बनाया जा रहा है। इससे ये सामाजिक कलंक धीरे-धीरे धुल रहा है। पढ़िए कारण, दुष्परिणाम, समाधान और पीड़ितों की जुबानी डायन-बिसाही के दर्द की स्याह कहानी।

डायन कह कर दिया सामाजिक बहिष्कार

बोकारो जिले के डुमरी प्रखंड की विमला कुजूर कभी डायन के नाम पर काफी प्रताड़ित हुई थीं। सामाजिक बहिष्कार का दंश तक झेलना पड़ा था। वर्ष 2019 में डायन कुप्रथा के खिलाफ लोगों को जागरूक करने के लिए गांव में नुक्कड़ टीम आयी थी। विमला ने इन्हें पूरी कहानी बतायी। टीम के सदस्यों ने ग्रामीणों को जागरूक किया कि डायन कहकर किसी को प्रताड़ित करना कानूनन जुर्म है। जेल भी हो सकती है। इसके बाद ग्रामीणों में भी परिवर्तन आया। अब ग्रामीणों ने विमला को डायन कहकर प्रताड़ित करना बंद कर दिया। विमला अब सम्मान का जिंदगी जी रही हैं।

भाभी ने ही बना दिया डायन

पिछले छह साल से डायन के नाम पर प्रताड़ित हो रही थी। फुफेरी भाभी ने ही उनका जीना मुहाल कर रखा था। फुफेरी भाभी के नाती को निमोनिया था। इसका इलाज नहीं कराकर ओझा-गुणी के चक्कर में पड़ी रहीं और उन्हें डायन कह कर प्रताड़ित करने लगीं। बाहर आने-जाने और लोगों से बातचीत करने पर रोक लगा दिया गया। इससे अपने घर में ही जिंदगी कैद-सी हो गयी थी। दिव्यांग पति और 8 बच्चों के साथ जीवन गुजर-बसर करने वाली यासमीन निशा के चेहरे पर आज मुस्कान है। गरिमा परियोजना के तहत डायन कुप्रथा के खिलाफ नुक्कड़ नाटक टीम को उन्होंने इसकी जानकारी दी। इसके बाद सखी मंडल की विभिन्न योजनाओं से जुड़ने के बाद उनकी जिंदगी में बदलाव आने लगा।

डायन के नाम पर छीन ली आंख की रोशनी

डायन के नाम पर इतना प्रताड़ित किया गया कि नकली आंख तक लगानी पड़ी. ग्रामीणों ने डायन के नाम पर उनसे मारपीट की. इसमें आंख में चोट लगी और रोशनी तक चली गयी. इससे मानसिक स्थिति के साथ-साथ इनकी आर्थिक स्थिति भी खराब हो गयी. इस दोहरी परेशानी से बाहर निकालने में सखी मंडल की दीदियां वरदान साबित हुईं. आज अपने समाज में वह सम्मान से जी रही हैं. ये दर्द है सिमडेगा के अंबापानी की हेलेन लकड़ा का. वह कहती हैं कि गरिमा प्रोजेक्ट ने उन्हें नयी जिंदगी दी है.

पति की मौत के बाद बना दिया डायन

15 साल पहले पति गुजर गये. इसके साथ ही उन पर मुसीबतों का पहाड़ टूट पड़ा. गोतिया व घरवालों ने उन्हें डायन का आरोप लगाकर परेशान करना शुरू कर दिया. मारपीट करने लगे. सखी मंडल से जुड़ने के बाद उनके जीवन में गजब का परिवर्तन हुआ. आज वे अपने पैरों पर खड़ी हैं. ये कहते बोकारो जिले के हंसलता गांव की 43 वर्षीया गायत्री देवी का गला रुंध जाता है. कहती हैं कि गरिमा परियोजना ने उन्हें गरिमा प्रदान की है.

गढ़वा में सर्वाधिक 1278 केस दर्ज

झारखंड में 2015 से अक्टूबर 2020 तक डायन बिसाही के आरोप में 211 महिलाओं की हत्या की गयी है. इनमें सर्वाधिक चाईबासा की 40, गुमला की 32, खूंटी की 29, सिमडेगा की 22 और रांची की 20 महिलाएं शामिल हैं. झारखंड पुलिस के रिकॉर्ड में वर्ष 2015 से अक्टूबर 2020 तक 4658 डायन अधिनियम से जुड़े मामले विभिन्न जिलों के थानों में दर्ज किये गये हैं. इनमें सबसे ज्यादा गढ़वा में 1278, पलामू में 446, हजारीबाग में 406, गिरिडीह में 387, देवघर में 316, गोड्डा में 236 मामले दर्ज किये गये हैं यानी हर वर्ष डायन बिसाही के आरोप में प्रताड़ना और हत्या के औसतन 931 मामले सामने आते हैं. इस सामाजिक कुरीति को खत्म करने के लिए 'डायन प्रथा प्रतिरोध अधिनियम-2001' लागू है, लेकिन जमीनी हकीकत ये है कि कड़ाई से इसका पालन नहीं होता.

महिलाओं पर ढाये जाते हैं ऐसे-ऐसे जुल्म

डायन बिसाही के नाम पर महिलाओं को तरह-तरह से प्रताड़ित किया जाता है. महिलाओं से मारपीट की जाती है. मल-मूत्र पिलाया जाता है. निर्वस्त्र कर उनके साथ दुराचार किया जाता है. उनकी हत्या तक कर दी जाती है. उनके परिवार के लोगों को प्रताड़ित कर सामाजिक तौर पर हुक्का-पानी बंद कर दिया जाता है. महिलाओं को जीना मुश्किल कर दिया जाता है. घर से बाहर निकलना मुश्किल हो जाता है. पुलिस को महिला अपराध के ऐसे मामलों में सखी बरतने की जरूरत है.

संपत्ति हड़पने का भी अचूक हथियार

पीड़िता विधवा है, तो ऐसे में उसकी संपत्ति हड़पने के लिए उसके नाते-रिश्तेदार व दबंग प्रवृत्ति के लोग उसे डायन घोषित कर देते हैं और उसे प्रताड़ित करते हैं या फिर दूसरे लोगों के जरिये प्रताड़ित करवाते हैं। निःसंतान दंपती के साथ भी संपत्ति हड़पने को लेकर ऐसा किया जाता है, ताकि सामाजिक छवि खराब कर उसकी संपत्ति पर कब्जा किया जा सके। पुलिस ऐसे मामलों में शिकायत के बाद गंभीरता बरते, तो पीड़ित महिलाओं को काफी राहत मिल सकती है।

अशिक्षितों को उकसाते हैं ओझा-गुणी

पुलिस अधिकारियों की मानें, तो अधिकतर घटनाओं में यह बात सामने आती है कि किसी का बच्चा बीमार है। किसी का बच्चा या घर के लोग बीमारी की वजह से मर जाते हैं, तो अशिक्षित लोग अंधविश्वास में ओझा-गुणी के पास झाड़ू-फूंक के लिए चले जाते हैं। वहां ओझा गुणी गांव के किसी महिला या पुरुष का नाम बता देता है कि उसने जादू टोना किया है। गुस्से में लोग उस व्यक्ति या महिला को प्रताड़ित करने लगते हैं और उसकी हत्या तक कर देते हैं। अशिक्षा के कारण अंधविश्वास में डायन-बिसाही के शक में महिलाओं की जिंदगी नर्क बन जा रही है। ऐसे में कड़ी कानूनी कार्रवाई हो तो काफी हद तक इन मामलों पर रोक संभव है।

2015 से अक्टूबर 2020 तक डायन बिसाही में हत्या व कुल मामले

	हत्या	कुल मामले		हत्या	कुल मामले
गढ़वा	09	1278	पाकुड़	04	50
पलामू	07	446	दुमका	07	49
हजारीबाग	01	406	जमशेदपुर	09	44
गिरिडीह	04	387	खूंटी	29	40
देवघर	01	316	सिमडेगा	22	32
चतरा	02	251	सरायकेला	08	35
गोड्डा	00	236			
जामताड़ा	01	159			
बोकारो	01	126			
साहिबगंज	01	120			
लातेहार	03	112			
गुमला	32	107			
रांची	20	96			
रामगढ़	01	92			
लोहरदगा	03	77			
कोडरमा	00	76			
चाईबासा	40	62			

कलंक धोने के लिए चल रही गरिमा परियोजना

झारखंड में डायन कुप्रथा उन्मूलन के लिए जेएसएलपीएस (झारखंड स्टेट लाइवलीहुड प्रमोशन सोसाइटी) द्वारा 'गरिमा परियोजना' चलाई जा रही है। झारखंड के 7 जिलों में इसके तहत पीड़ित महिलाओं को न सिर्फ चिन्हित किया जा रहा है, बल्कि इन्हें सखी मंडल से जोड़कर स्वावलंबी बनाकर मान-सम्मान बढ़ाया जा रहा है। परियोजना का लक्ष्य डायन कुप्रथा से प्रभावित क्षेत्रों की महिलाओं का आर्थिक एवं सामाजिक विकास कर गरिमामय जीवन देना है। डायन कुप्रथा की पीड़ित महिलाओं को काउंसेलिंग, कानूनी सहायता, मनोवैज्ञानिक काउंसेलिंग समेत अन्य सहायता के जरिए मुख्यधारा से जोड़ा जा रहा है।

933 पीड़ित महिलाओं की हुई पहचान

झारखंड में अब तक करीब 933 डायन कुप्रथा से पीड़ित महिलाओं की पहचान कर ली गयी है। इनमें करीब 438 चिन्हित पीड़ित महिलाओं को सखी मंडल के जरिए आजीविका के विभिन्न साधनों से जोड़ा गया है। करीब 567 चिन्हित महिलाओं की मनोचिकित्सकीय काउंसेलिंग की गयी है।

ऐसे होगा डायन कुप्रथा उन्मूलन

स्कूली बच्चों को बनाएं जागरूकता एंबेसडर: डॉ रवि रंजन, मुख्य न्यायाधीश

झारखंड हाईकोर्ट के मुख्य न्यायाधीश डॉ रवि रंजन कहते हैं कि 21वीं सदी में भी डायन कुप्रथा के जरिए महिलाओं से असमानता एवं भेदभाव किया जाना दुःखद है। जागरूकता एवं शिक्षा की कमी ऐसी कुप्रथाओं को बढ़ावा देती हैं। स्कूली बच्चों को डायन कुप्रथा समाप्त करने के लिए ब्रांड एंबेसडर के रूप में तैयार करना चाहिए, ताकि वे गांव में जागरूकता एंबेसडर बन सकें। झालसा के जरिए राज्यभर में ऐसी सामाजिक कुप्रथाओं को जड़ से खत्म करने के लिए कार्य किया जा रहा है।

छुटनी देवी को गरिमा परियोजना का ब्रांड एंबेसडर बनाएं: अपरेश सिंह, न्यायाधीश

झारखंड हाईकोर्ट के न्यायाधीश अपरेश सिंह ने कहते हैं कि डायन कुप्रथा को समाप्त करने के लिए शिक्षा एवं कानूनी जानकारी लोगों तक पहुंचाने की जरूरत है। डायन कुप्रथा को खत्म करने के लिए कई कानून बनाये गये हैं। झालसा लोगों को जागरूक करने का कार्य कर रही है।

2023 तक झारखंड को डायन कुप्रथा मुक्त करने की कोशिश: पद्मश्री छुटनी देवी

डायन कुप्रथा पर सामाजिक कार्य के लिए पद्मश्री से सम्मानित छुटनी देवी कहती हैं कि एक वक्त था, जब डायन के रूप में गांव के लोगों ने उन्हें भी मारने की कोशिश की थी, लेकिन बुलंद हौसले से उन्होंने इसका सामना किया। आज करीब 145 डायन कुप्रथा से पीड़ित महिलाओं को मुख्यधारा

में ला चुकी हैं, जिन्हें गांव में डायन कहकर प्रताड़ित किया जाता था। 2023 तक झारखंड को डायन कुप्रथा मुक्त बनाने की कोशिश की जायेगी।

डायन कुप्रथा मुक्त पंचायत बनाने पर जोर: डॉ मनीष रंजन

झारखंड के ग्रामीण विकास सचिव डॉ मनीष रंजन कहते हैं कि गरिमा परियोजना एक शुरुआत है। उनका लक्ष्य झारखंड को डायन कुप्रथा मुक्त बनाना है। इसके लिए जल्द ही जेंडर मंच बनाया जायेगा और अंधविश्वास एवं भेदभाव को दूर कर लोगों को जागरूक किया जायेगा। सखी मंडल की बहनों द्वारा नुकड़ नाटक के जरिए प्रभावित गांवों में जागरूकता अभियान चलाया जाएगा। पीड़ितों को सुरक्षा व काउंसेलिंग की जायेगी। पुनर्वास पर भी काम किया जायेगा और आजीविका से जोड़ा जायेगा। इस तरह डायन कुप्रथा मुक्त पंचायत का निर्माण कर इसे जड़ से खत्म किया जायेगा। आने वाले दिनों में झारखंड की करीब 5000 डायन कुप्रथा से पीड़ित महिलाओं को लाभान्वित किया जायेगा।

मानसिक स्वास्थ्य काउंसेलिंग के लिए हेल्पलाइन नंबर: डॉ बासुदेव राम

सीआईपी (केंद्रीय मन: चिकित्सा संस्थान, कांके) के निदेशक डॉ बासुदेव राम कहते हैं कि गरिमा परियोजना के अंतर्गत सीआईपी मानसिक स्वास्थ्य एवं मनोचिकित्सकीय सहयोग के लिए कार्य करेगा। पीड़ित महिलाओं को नया जीवन देने में मानसिक स्वास्थ्य की पहल की जायेगी। मानसिक स्वास्थ्य काउंसेलिंग के लिए साआईपी के 15 हेल्पलाइन नंबर 24 घंटे कार्य कर रहे हैं।

महिला सशक्तीकरण एवं शिक्षा से खत्म होगी डायन कुप्रथा: डॉ सुनीता रॉय

यूजीसी वीमेंस सेंटर की प्रमुख डॉ सुनीता रॉय ने का मानना है कि समाज को शिक्षित करने से ही डायन कुप्रथा का उन्मूलन संभव है। पीड़ित महिलाओं को प्रशिक्षित कर उन्हें सशक्त आजीविका से जोड़ना होगा। ग्रामीण इलाके से ओझा गुणी जैसे अंधविश्वास की जड़ों को खत्म करने के लिए शिक्षा बेहद जरूरी है। इसके लिए ग्रामीण महिलाओं को जागरूक करना अनिवार्य है। महिलाएं शिक्षित होंगी और आर्थिक रूप से सशक्त होंगी, तो यह कुप्रथा खत्म हो जायेगी। वे कहती हैं कि किन्नरों को भी इस जागरूकता अभियान से जोड़ने की जरूरत है ताकि उनकी आजीविका की भी व्यवस्था हो सके।

गरिमा परियोजना से मिलेगी डायन कुप्रथा: नैसी सहाय

जेएसएलपीएस (झारखंड स्टेट लाइवलीहुड प्रमोशन सोसाइटी) की सीईओ नैसी सहाय बताती हैं कि गरिमा परियोजना के जरिए राज्य में डायन कुप्रथा को जड़ से मिटाने के लिए कार्य किया जा रहा है। पीड़ित महिलाओं की पहचान करना और उन्हें सखी मंडल से जोड़कर आत्मनिर्भर बनाना है। इतना ही नहीं, इसके जरिए उन्हें नयी जिंदगी देना है और इस दिशा में कार्य किया जा रहा है।

Guru Swarup Mishra is a journalist who has worked with Prabhat Khabar Digital, Panchayatnama, and Hindustan. His areas of focus include transgender rights and human trafficking. He has completed his M.A in Mass Communication from Ranchi University.

<https://www.prabhatkhabar.com/state/jharkhand/ranchi/witch-hunting-eradication-from-jharkhand-by-jslps-garima-project-grj>



Advertising, Book and Film Award Winners

Advertising

LAADLI Grand Prix

Dentsu Webchutney

Tanishq – ‘Marriage Conversations’



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnZduCnSMpk&>

‘This wedding season, let’s talk about the marriage,’ says Tanishq, in this ad campaign for its engagement rings. The ‘Marriage Conversations’ spotlights real-life issues that brands seldom talk about. This is a marked shift from adorning weddings to talking about life issues thereafter.

Ogilvy

Project Nanhi Kali - ‘The Tale Of 2 Lajjos’



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIW99kA6vc8&>

The tale of two Lajjos is a hard-hitting film that drives home the message that there are a large number of underprivileged girl children who end up not getting an education. As the film says, *“For some girls in India, education is not just a human right. It’s a way for them to feel human”*

Corporate

BDBO India

P&G Shiksha – ‘The Story of Sushila’



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yF-gXxHOkIk>

The Story of Sushila is a moving tale of a beneficiary of the Shiksha programme, who is now teaching other children under the same programme. The campaign presents a compelling reason to choose P&G products convincingly. The protagonist is a young woman, who writes to a father cradling his infant. While Shiksha is a gender-neutral initiative for educating kids, its impact is told with gender sensitivity.

Category Buster

Django Digital

Lemme Be – ‘My Story. Period!’



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgZvgs-BdJQ>

The film helps the brand live up to its name of ‘Lemme Be’ wearing not just its attitude with sass but also echoing what’s on the minds of young menstruators. The representation of blood in its actual color is a reality check.

Product

Coconut Films

Royal Enfield – ‘Home’



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB_7DgXHKOE&feature=emb_imp_woyt

This is a poetic ode to one’s home and the inimitable place it holds. In the words of juror Mohamed Khan, *“This is as good as it gets.”* It is a young woman who rides home from a faraway land to her roots on the motorcycle one associates readily with men. Everything special about ‘home’ unfolds through her journey, her past and the present. The immersive film transports us into her life, and home.

Product - Runner Up

BDBO India

Ariel - 'When We #Seeequal, We #Sharetheload'



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA64FF7MR58>

This edition of #ShareTheLoad awakens us to another facet of ingrained yet invisible inequality amongst genders in the sharing of domestic work. When men share the load with other men, they share homes with when single, why not with their spouses after marriage? Makes you think, yet again.

Product - Runner Up

Shreyansh Innovations

Manyavar – Mohey



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUNAMOCocDE&feature=emb_logo

The bridal wear brand proposes a new and thoughtful idea, #KanyaMaan. The film evocatively spells out how everything in a girl's life is looked at as a path to #KanyaDaan, through protagonist-bride Alia Bhatt. This is a wake-up call that should help break some mindsets.

Services

Lowe Lintas Delhi Google India – Manjha



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1uci5Sc1eY&feature=youtu.be>

Google beautifully aligns its voice search product with progress through multiple films in the 'Bolne Se Sab Hoga' campaign. The brand has chosen to champion gender in these films, showing how it can empower women to find their rightful place in society with equal opportunities, armed with information.

Social Experiment

DDB Mudra Stayfree - It's Just a Period



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHMFkgjjBYM&feature=emb_logo

The brand has sought to address the hesitance on the part of dads in having conversations on periods with their daughters. Bringing the subject out of the closet through this 'Social Experiment', Stayfree has attempted to break the taboo and normalize these important conversations.

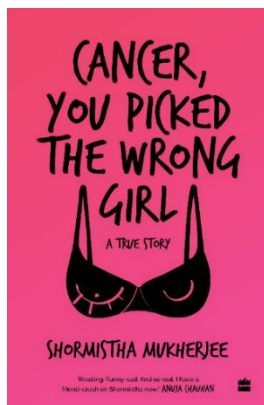
Books

English - Autobiography

Shormistha Mukherjee – ‘Cancer, You Picked the Wrong Girl’

Harper Collins Publishers India Limited

Shormistha Mukherjee’s humour-laced account of her encounter with breast cancer diagnosis and treatment is packed with emotional sucker-punches and hard truths, her deliberating the pros and cons of breast reconstruction to finding a ‘setting’ in the chemo ward making it a small piece of comfort for anyone touched by cancer.



English - Non-Fiction

Manjima Bhattacharjya – ‘Intimate City’

Zubaan Publishers

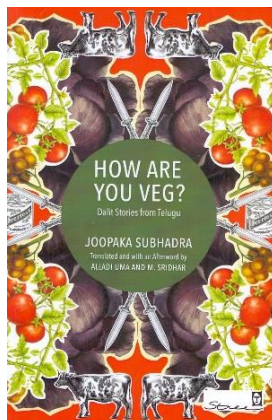
Manjima Bhattacharjya studies the shifting cross sections of changing red light areas, the world of escort services, massage boys, and men in search of casual encounters on the internet. With Mumbai as the backdrop of various narratives, she explores how the digital changed the feminist understandings of sex work, choice, consent, and agency in this one-of-a-kind book.



Joopaka Subhadra – ‘How Are You Veg? Dalit Stories from Telugu’

Stree-Samya Books

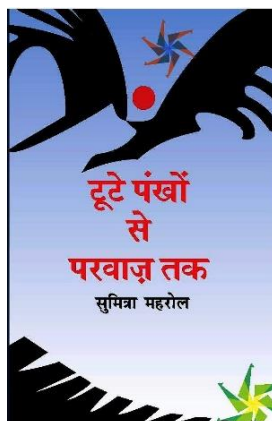
Joopaka Subhadra's stories expose the discrimination faced by the Madiga women, the most oppressed among Dalits in Telangana. These moving and powerful tales illustrate the abject conditions, feudal hierarchies, societal apathy towards women with disabilities, and government indifference despite education and employment.



Hindi - Autobiography

Sumitra Mehrol – ‘Tute Pankhon Se Parwaj Tak’ The Marginalized Publication

Sumitra Mehrol's book offers a vivid description of her lived experience of being a woman with a disability who lives in a Dalit family mired deeply in patriarchal traditions. She evocatively pencils instances that reveal the pain and challenges that brutally trample her delicate feeling under the harsh norms, yet could not crush her indomitable spirit.



Films

Feature Film - Hindi

Sanjay Leela Bhansali - Gangubai Kathiawadi



The film uses the elements of our popular form with a top star to delve deep into the struggles of a prostitute in the red-light districts of Mumbai and exposes our hypocritical male-dominated system. What is unusual about the story is that the character pushes this seemingly moral dilemma to a political level in her fight for justice.

Feature Film - Tamil

Gautham Ramachandran - Gargi

The film sensitively and with admirable restraint charts the journey of a doughty lower middle-class woman struggling for justice through the unfeeling corridors of police stations and courtrooms, while dealing with gender prejudice, standing up to self-serving media trials, and mob persecution.



OTT Release

Amit V. Masurkar - Sherni

Amazon Prime

Sherni brings to the fore subjects like human-wildlife conflict and wildlife conservation as it traces the subtle struggle of a resolute forest officer battling sexism and corruption, as well as nature. The film explores the lopsided nature of development, the rights of forest dwellers, the dangers of a depleting forest cover, and the lust of politicians for power.



Web Series

Tanuj Chopra - Delhi Crime (Season 2)



Delhi Crime Season 2 follows the Deputy Commissioner of Police Vartika Chaturvedi (Shefali Shah) and her trusted lieutenants as they solve the Kachha Baniyan rampage in Delhi's posh district. The layered narrative poses pertinent questions about the social divide and its role in the crimes, political nexus, and the lethargy of the police and its leaning to acquiesce to the political bosses.

Anagha Unni - Porgai (Pride): A Film on The Revival of Lambadi Art



Woven together with various insights from experts from the field of craft in India Porgai (Pride): A Film on the Revival of Lambadi Art, showcases the plausibility of achieving a modest life of equity and happiness. At a time when everyone races towards radical development, Porgai, and its artisans show courage in walking the opposite way, aiming for an organic way of livelihood, and spreading the message of a just world.

Special Award Winners

LAADLI OF THE CENTURY

(Late) Ela Bhatt



The late Ela Ramesh Bhatt's unparalleled contribution to making the social fabric more equitable extends beyond the geographical boundaries of her native country. An Indian cooperative organizer, activist, and Gandhian, who founded the Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA), she was a part of the international labour, cooperative, women, and micro-finance movements.

LAADLI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Indira Jaising



Indira Jaising is veritable trailblazer with many firsts to her credit, the first woman to be designated a Senior Advocate by the High Court of Bombay and the first female Additional Solicitor General of India. She has steadfastly argued for equal rights for the economic rights of women, estranged wives and women facing domestic violence. She has also fought for the rights of the marginalized sections like the pavement dwellers and the homeless, the Bhopal gas tragedy victims, and child labourers.

LAADLI WOMAN BEHIND THE SCREEN

Kausar Munir



Kausar Munir has immortalized numerous powerful characters as a screenplay writer, lyricist, and dialogue writer. Whether it is the emotive dialogues of Begum Jaan or Rocket Boys, the strength of Jassi in Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin, or the poignant ode to a mother, Meri Pyari Ammi, she has penned work that has proved to be a key ingredient of many successful films.

LAADLI GENDER CHAMPION

Advocate Varsha Deshpande

Varsha Deshpande has been courageously working to save and protect the girl child through judicious implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 2002. Founder of the 'Lek-Laadki Abhiyaan' that advocates the principle 'Eliminate Inequality, not Women, Destroy Dowry not Daughters', she has remained undeterred by threats to her life and attempts to buy her over by medical mafia as she continues to campaign against doctors providing illegal service of prenatal sex selection.



Rohini Hattangadi

A career that spans nearly four decades of theatrical excellence with well-applauded performances in plays like Changuna Aparajita, Yakshgana, Ibaragi, a Japanese Kabuki Play, Mitra Chi Gosht, Hori based on Premchand's Godaan, Kohra and more, Rohini Hattangadi has established herself as a well-respected theatre personality who is a veritable role model for many aspirants. Her contributions include Awishkar, a prolific theatre group, and 'Kalashray', a center for research, education in arts, and talent encouragement in Mumbai, which worked with the underprivileged and developed tools for powerful communication.



Jury Profiles

A

1. **Amita Dhanu** - Deputy Director General (Programmes), Family Planning Association of India
2. **Anand Madhab** - Former CEO of Jagran Pehle, former Principal Consultant, Gender Resource Centre, Department of Social Welfare, Government of Bihar
3. **Anjum Rajabali** - veteran Indian screenwriter, actor, teacher, and activist for screenwriters' rights
4. **Dr. A. L. Sharada** - Director, Population First, gender expert, teacher, researcher, and gender trainer
5. **Anuja Gulati** - Program Management Specialist, UNFPA
6. **Anuradha Bhasin** - Internationally published journalist, author, Executive Editor, Kashmir Time, Commonwealth Fellow 2016, and peace activist
7. **Dr. Arathi Pm** - Assistant Professor at the School of Indian Legal Thought, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala
8. **Asiya Sherwani** - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Organizational Ethics Advisor & Consultant

B

9. **Bobby Sista** - Doyen of Indian Advertising, Executive Trustee at Population First

C

10. **C. Vanaja** - Award-winning journalist, TV presenter, and filmmaker
11. **Prof Chandrashekar Bhat** - An independent researcher on Diaspora Studies, Founder of the Centre for the Study of Indian Diaspora, Hyderabad, and author

D

12. **Divya Jain** - Multilingual independent journalist, feminist, and former editor of Antarang Sangini
13. **Divya Gupta (Ayesha)** - A development practitioner, communications specialist, and journalist
14. **Dolly Thakore** - Television Newscaster, veteran commentator, columnist, communication and public relations consultant, author, associate publisher, editor, casting director, and actor

G

15. **Geeta Seshu** - An independent journalist
16. **Dr. Gita Chadha** - Professor of Sociology at Mumbai University, author, specialist 'Feminism and Science'
17. **Gitali Vinayak** - Chief Editor, Miloon Saryajani, a Marathi magazine and a social activist
18. **Gokul Krishnamoorthy** - Founder and Curator, www.cluttercutter.in, Founding Editor, EVENTFAQS Media, columnist, consulting editor
19. **Govind Chaturvedi** - A veteran journalist was associated with Dainik Navjyoti, UNI, Rajasthan Patrika, and more

I

20. **Indira Chandrasekhar** - Scientist, fiction writer, and the founder-editor of Out of Print, an online short story magazine
21. **Indu Capoor** - Founder Director of Centre for Health, Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA)

J

22. **Jyotsna Kaur Habibullah** - Social entrepreneur, and philanthropist. Associated with FICCI FLO Kanpur Chapter as Member, National Governing Body on Women Empowerment
23. **Jeroo Mulla** - Faculty member at Social Communications at Sophia Polytechnic and Symbiosis, Pune. Researcher, Film critic

K

24. **Kiran Manral** - An author, TEDx speaker, columnist and mentor, journalist, researcher, festival curator, and entrepreneur
25. **Kondaveeti Satyavati** - Women's rights activist and founder Editor of the first feminist magazine in Andhra Pradesh – 'Streevada Patrika' – Bhumiika in 1993
26. **Dr. Kusum Tripathi** - Professor at Dr. B.R. University of Social Science Mhow, author
27. **Prof. Kuldeep Kaur** - Retired vice principal of G.N. Khalsa College of arts, science, and commerce, Mumbai, a visiting faculty at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, dialect coach

L

28. **Loganayaki Ramachandran** - Writer, journalist, editor, social worker, and Relationship counselor. Former Editor of 'Snehidhi' – a leading Tamil bi-weekly for women

M

29. **Malathi Bhat** - Columnist, editorial adviser to 'Profit Plus' Magazine, former news editor, Prajavani, and author
30. **Mahashweta Jani** - State co-ordinator Gujarat in Lokniti CSDS Delhi, special interest in Caste, gender, and politics in Gujarat, consultant for SEWA: Ansooya
31. **Malti Mehta** - Teaches Mass Communication, Communication Skills, Development Communication, and Film production, Documentary & Short Film Maker
32. **Meena Karnik** - Senior independent journalist, film critic, author, translator, Co-editor Akshar, author of 'Gautam, jury at international film festivals
33. **Meghna Ghai Puri** – Educationist, mentor, changes catalyst. President, Whistling Woods
34. **Mohammed Khan** - A legend in Indian advertising, he set up some of the country's best agencies, including Contract and Rediffusion, as well as Enterprise Nexus

N

35. **Nandini Dias** - Former CEO of Lodestar UM, Hon Secretary International Advertising Association, Governing Board Member Mumbai First, a sports enthusiast, and a national level badminton player

P

36. **Parmesh Sahani** - an author, public speaker, culture curator, inclusion advocate, vice president at Godrej Industries Ltd., and the founder of the award-winning Godrej India Culture Lab in Mumbai
37. **Pervin Saket** - Vancouver Manuscript Intensive Fellow, Poet, Novelist, and Editor
38. **Piyush Jha** - Film director, screenwriter, OTT show creator, and the author of crime-fiction novels
39. **Pratima Joshi** - Senior journalist, writer, and social activist.
40. **Preeta Mathur** - Head of Ank Theatre Group, a podcaster and media contributor on theatre

R

41. **R. Hariharan** - Indian film director
42. **Rajan Mahan** - Professor of Journalism at the University of Rajasthan and a veteran Journalist with NDTV
43. **Rajat Ray** - Social innovations consultant. Was the Senior Advocacy Officer at UNFPA
44. **Rajesh Mahapatra** - Editor, PTI, columnist and commentator on public policy, and founder of the Forum for Odisha Dialogues
45. **Ranjona Banerji** - Independent journalist, currently a Consulting Editor with MxMIndia.com
46. **Renuka Shahane** - Full-time mom, actor, writer, director
47. **Prof. Ritu Dewan** - Vice President of the Indian Society of Labour Economics and formerly Director of the Department of Economics, University of Mumbai
48. **Rizwan Ahamd** - Director, Instructional Media Centre, MANUU, Hyderabad, an educationist, a media professional, and former Deputy Director, Deputy Director at the Directorate of Film Festivals.
49. **Rupa Mehta** - Producer at Doordarshan (Prasar Bharati) and retired Assistant Director, Doordarshan Kendra, Ahmedabad

S

50. **Sajaya Kakarla** - Independent journalist, columnist, social analyst, translator, documentary filmmaker, and feminist activist Publisher of Likhita Press
51. **Sampad Mahapatra** - Former Editor of 'The Sambad' and Founder Editor of 'The Nitidin', former Odisha Bureau Chief of NDTV
52. **Sandeep Sahu** - Multilingual journalist associated with the BBC World Service from Odisha, OTV, Outlook magazine, thequint.com, news18.com, and others
53. **Satyavati Maurya** - Veteran Hindi journalist associated with Meri Saheli, Arogya Sanjivani, Roop Nihar, Sahitya Abha and more
54. **Sathya Saran** - Consulting Editor with Penguin Random House India, former Editor of Femina, author. Teaches fashion journalism at NIFT, a stage actor, and curator 'The Spaces between Words'
55. **Saumya Baijal** - Feminist, bilingual writer, ad woman, storyteller, poet, guest lecturer, radio presenter, theatre person, activist
56. **Sayed Raza Hussain Zaidi** - A gender trainer, queer feminist, and Co-founder of Aazaadi International
57. **Shahina K. K.** - Associate Editor of the news portal 'The Federal'
58. **Dr. Shahida Murtaza** - Director, Centre for Women's Studies at Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, Dr. Shahida is a sitting member of national and international academic bodies

59. **Shajahan Madampat** - Writer, critic, and social commentator based in the Middle East who writes on issues related to culture, media, and Middle East affairs
60. **Sharad Pradhan** - Veteran independent journalist, political analyst, columnist, and author. Editor, The Free Press - digital news channel
61. **Dr. Shoma A. Chatterji** - Independent journalist, author, film scholar, and veteran film critic. She has authored 26 books of which eight are on gender issues
62. **Smriti Nevatia** - curator, selector, and jury for film festivals, documentary script writer and teacher, writer-researcher on gender and sexuality, and writer, director, and executive producer for shows on TV
63. **Soma Dutta** - former Cultural Ambassador to South Korea, Kathak dancer, certified career counselor, Vice-President of the WICCI Rural Tourism Council of West Bengal
64. **Surekha Shenoy** - COO and Chief of Staff for TIAA G6BS India, Corporate leader, Philanthropist, and mentor
65. **Sudha Arora** - A leading feminist writer in Hindi, editor of books, playwright, scriptwriter, and author
66. **Sudhir Mishra** - Senior journalist, currently Resident Editor in Navbharat Times, Delhi

T

67. **Teresa Rehman** - An award-winning journalist, author, and media educator based in northeast India

U

68. **Usha Thorat** - Former Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and a champion of financial inclusion

V

69. **Vasantha Lakshmi** - Noted journalist, former assistant editor at Andhra Jyothi, editor, of various Human Rights publications and books
70. **Dr. Vibhuti Patel** - gender economist, and women's rights activist, former Professor, at TISS and SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

Y

71. **Yasmin Sait** - Author, Counsellor, and Life Purpose Coach on a mission to empower women at different stages of their life.

DEEP DIVE TAKES US INTO THE DEPTHS OF INSENSITIVITY, INJUSTICE, AND VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY. IT CAPTURES THE STORIES OF WOMEN FROM THE ENTITLED, MARGINALIZED AND DEPRIVED SECTIONS WHO REMAIN INVISIBLE IN THE MEDIA. IT HIGHLIGHTS THE WIDESPREAD MISOGYNY IN SOCIETY. THE INSENSITIVITY, AND APATHY OF THE POWERS THAT BE. IT ALSO GIVES US A REASON TO CELEBRATE BY BRINGING TO US THE SUCCESS STORIES OF WOMEN WHO ARE REDEFINING THE SOCIAL EQUATIONS AND RECLAIMING THEIR RIGHTFUL SPACE IN SOCIETY. DEEP DIVE IS A TRIBUTE TO ALL THE JOURNALISTS WHO PURSUE THEIR CALLING WITH COURAGE AND CONVICTION.

DR A L SHARADA

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