

**heard,
written,
told...**

UN

**AWARD-WINNING ENTRIES
OF LMA 2025**

Edited by : Yogesh Pawar



Celebrate Her Life
An Initiative by Population First



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Preface

For too long, the truest chronicle of India has resided in the shadows—in the silent labour of its women, the stifled protests of its marginalised, and the quiet resilience that systems mistake for acceptance. This book is an act of bringing that chronicle into the light. It is a chorus of voices that have been Unheard, a record of realities that have been Unwritten, and an archive of struggles that have remained Untold.

The 35 stories within are grouped by theme, but they are bound by a common thread: the fierce insistence on being seen, heard, and recognised. All the others will be accommodated in the

In Labour, Livelihood & Economic Empowerment, we meet the unheard backbone of our nation—the ASHA worker demanding payment for her vital work, the woman farmer toiling without the title, the gig worker seeking protection in a digital void. Their economic contributions have been systematically erased from the ledgers of power.

The brutal spectres of Violence & Systemic Injustice thrive in the silence around tradition. The cries of women branded as witches, the trauma of marital rape survivors, and the defiance of those fighting honour killings are struggles that have been deliberately untold to maintain a facade of social order. Here, they are documented with unflinching clarity.

When we turn to Body, Health & Autonomy, we confront the unwritten rules that govern the most intimate aspects of life. The disproportionate burden of sterilisation on women, the harrowing quest for queer-affirming healthcare, and the profound indignity of menstrual exclusion are battles fought over the right to control one's own body—a narrative medicine and policy have long ignored.

The section on Identity, Representation & Breaking Stereotypes gives voice to the unheard ambition of women driving jeeps in jungles, performing autopsies, and reclaiming the night. It critiques the distorted mirrors of cinema and media, challenging the stereotypes that have confined potential for generations.

The voices in Marginalised Genders & Intersectional Struggles are perhaps the most systematically unwritten. The fight for dignity by transgender individuals against hollow welfare boards and for safe housing is a story of a community writing itself into existence against relentless erasure.

The deep-seated Patriarchy, Power & Political Discourse is analysed not as an abstract force, but in its tangible, chilling cost—from the gendered imbalance in organ donation to the communal hatred that fractures democracy. These analyses make visible the invisible architecture of oppression.

In Climate, Environment & Resilience, we witness the untold leadership of women who are not victims but architects of survival. They are charting maps for sustainable living and guarding urban lungs, their wisdom forming a critical, yet overlooked, frontline against ecological collapse.

Finally, Resilience & Personal Triumph chronicles the ultimate rewriting of destiny. From a taunted child becoming a world champion to survivors of horrific violence reclaiming their narratives, these are the stories that scream a powerful truth: even the most unheard voice, once it finds the courage to speak, can tell the most unwritten story, ensuring it is never again untold.

This anthology is more than a collection of award-winning journalism. It is a testament. It is a correction to the historical record. It is the sound of silence breaking. It is our hope that this collection becomes a go-to reference for media professionals, academic institutions, and the public, enabling a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how gender shapes and is shaped by the realities of everyday life.

Bringing this volume to you has been a collective endeavour. We extend our sincere thanks to Pooja Nagdev for her unwavering commitment and consistent support in shaping this anthology. On behalf of Team Population First, we also express our profound gratitude to UNFPA for their steadfast partnership and support of the *Laadli* Media Advocacy initiative, which made the publication of this essential work possible.

-Yogesh Pawar

Programme Director
Population First

About Population First

Population First is a social impact organisation working on health and population issues from a gender and social development perspective. Population First was registered in March 2002 by Bobby Sista, doyen of the Indian advertising Industry, under the Bombay Public Trusts Act (1950) to leverage communication and media influence to address the social and demographic issues in the country.

Population First believes that unequal social development and gendered mindsets are responsible for the poor social demographic indices - be it maternal and child mortality, child marriages, or the falling sex ratios.

Population First focuses on the gendered mindsets which undermine the value of girls and women, promote discrimination against them, and justify gender-based violence. The challenge is to change those mindsets.

ABOUT LAADLI MEDIA INITIATIVES

The *Laadli* Media Advocacy initiatives focus on promoting gender sensitivity in media and communication to build a more gender equitable society by challenging the deep-seated misogyny and patriarchal mindsets in society. Recognising the importance of this section of our socio-economic tapestry, The *Laadli* Media and Advertising Advocacy initiatives focus on:

1. Capacity building of communicators
2. Creating a supportive ecosystem of industry stalwarts, thought leaders, policymakers and influencers promoting change
3. Institute awards and other reward mechanisms to reinforce positive change

The interventions to achieve these stated goals are:

- Workshops for various stakeholder such as media and film professionals, advertising agencies, industry groups, professional bodies and students of media, film and journalism Fellowships and networking platforms for journalists.
- Awards for excellence in gender sensitive portrayal across the fields of journalism, films, advertising, theatre, television, books and content creation.
- Campaigns and events to raise awareness on various nuances of gender sensitivity
- Reports, research studies publications, films, and innovative and creative content.

Website – www.populationfirst.org

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I.

Labour, Livelihood & Economic Empowerment

Highlighting the unpaid, underpaid, and pioneering work of women, and their fight for economic agency.

Across fields, homes, and offices, women's work has always kept the world running — yet it remains the least seen, the least paid, and the least acknowledged. This section shines a light on that invisible backbone of our economy and the many ways women continue to fight for recognition, fair pay, and agency. From women farmers who till the land without the title of 'kisan', to ASHA workers whose tireless service sustains public health even as they protest for their dues, these stories expose the quiet inequities underpinning everyday labour. They also celebrate those who break barriers — women entrepreneurs reimagining the start-up world with confidence and creativity, and gig workers demanding fair legislation and dignity within a shifting digital economy.

Together, these narratives go beyond wages or work. They speak of endurance, imagination, and everyday negotiation — of women asserting not just their right to livelihood, but to respect, autonomy, and voice. In chronicling both the invisibility and the innovation of women's labour, this section reminds us that the economy, in all its visible and hidden forms, continues to rest on their unwavering strength.

The Invisible Backbone:

Documenting unpaid labour and the struggle for recognition.

1. **Bhanu Prakash Rana** -
'खेती में भरपूर काम फिर भी महिला किसान होने का नहीं सम्मान'
2. **Ritu Sharma & Swadesha Sharma** - State reassures protesting
ASHAs.. Once again

Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Celebrating women entrepreneurs and
barrier-breakers.

1. **Punita Vaidya** - 'Start-Up Ni Duniyaa... Kudiyaan Ka Hai Zamana!'
2. **Manasi Phadke** - Goa isn't just a party capital, it is a start-up hub too.
And women are driving it

Precarious Work, Unprotected Rights: Examining vulnerabilities in the
informal sector and gig economy.

1. **Shreehari Paliath** - Why a robust gig work legislation will help
women workers

‘खेती में भरपूर काम फिर भी महिला किसान होने का नहीं सम्मान’

By Bhanu Prakash Rana, Farm N Food

सदियों से खेतीकिसानी के काम को पुरुषों का ही काम माना जाता रहा है, जबकि खेतों में काम करते हुए लोगों को अगर देखें, तो उस में सब से ज्यादा तादाद महिलाओं की ही होती है. खरीफ सीजन में खेतों में काम करने वाले किसानों की तादाद में और भी इजाफा हो जाता है, क्योंकि खरीफ सीजन में धान रोपाई से ले कर कटाई, हार्वेस्टिंग और भंडारण तक में महिलाएं ही भूमिका निभाती हैं. फिर भी घर की इन महिलाओं को किसान होने का दर्जा इसलिए नहीं मिल पाता है, क्योंकि जमीन का मालिकाना हक घर के पुरुष सदस्य के पास ही होता है.

हम किसानों के लिए संबोधन किए जाने वाले सरकारी या गैरसरकारी लैवल पर भाषाई स्तर पर नजर डालें, तो किसान के रूप में अन्नदाताओं के लिए सिर्फ ‘किसान भाई’ शब्द का इस्तेमाल किया जाता है, जबकि खेती में अहम भूमिका निभाने वाली महिलाओं को आज तक ‘किसान बहनों’ के नाम से संबोधित करते नहीं देखा गया. महिला किसानों के लिए यह असमानता मीडिया लैवल पर भी दिखाई देता रहा है.

खेती के करती हैं सभी काम, फिर भी नहीं मिलता दाम

महिलाएं घरपरिवार की देखभाल के साथसाथ पशुपालन, दूध निकालना, रोपाई, निराई, गुड़ाई, हार्वेस्टिंग और भंडारण तक का काम संभालती हैं, लेकिन जब कृषि उपज को बेचने की बात आती है, तो उस का निर्णय किसान कहलाने वाला घर का पुरुष सदस्य लेता है और उपज को बेच कर की हुई कमाई को भी अपने पास ही रखता है.

महिला किसानों के हक पर काम करने वाली माधुरी का कहना है कि जब महिलाएं दिनभर धान के पानी से भरे खेत में खड़ी हो कर पुरुषों की तरह ही निंदाईगुड़ाई कर सकती हैं, तो फिर मंडी में उसी फसल को बेचने के लिए उन्हें जाने क्यों नहीं दिया जाता बीज खरीदने, फसल बेचने, उस फसल से प्राप्त रकम के उपयोग में उस की भूमिका कहां चली जाती है, जबकि वह घर में सब से पहले उठने और सब से बाद में सोने वाली इकाई होती है?

किसान आंदोलन में खेती का पूरा काम महिलाओं के हवाले

देश के किसान जब खेतीबारी के मसलों पर नीति बनाने को ले कर दिल्ली और दिल्ली से सटे बौर्डर पर आंदोलन कर रहे थे, तो खेती से जुड़े 100 फीसदी कामों की जिम्मेदारियों को घर की महिलाओं ने ही संभाला था, लेकिन इस आंदोलन में चर्चा केवल पुरुष किसानों की ही हुई, जबकि अगर घर की महिलाएं खेती से जुड़े काम न संभालतीं तो खेती तो बरबाद ही होती. साथ ही, धरने पर बैठने वाले किसानों को आंदोलन में जीत भी नहीं मिलती.

महिलाओं ने इस दौरान न केवल खेती के काम बखूबी संभाले, बल्कि घर के बड़ेबुजुर्गों की देखभाल से ले कर बच्चों को स्कूल जाने के लिए तैयार करना, खाना पकाने जैसे काम को भी अंजाम दिया. किसान आंदोलन के दौरान हजारों की तादाद में महिला किसान भी धरने पर नजर आईं.

महिला किसानों के हक पर काम करने वाली माधुरी का कहना है कि पुरुषों के नाम खेती की जमीन होने मात्र से हम किसान होने का मानक तय नहीं कर सकते हैं, बल्कि हमें खेती में 80 फीसदी तक योगदान देने वाली घर की महिलाओं को भी 'महिला किसान' के रूप में सम्मान देना सीखना होगा.

महिला किसानों ने बढ़ाया महिलाओं का हौसला

बिहार में 'किसान चाची' के नाम से जानी जाने वाली एक महिला किसान हम सभी के लिए बड़ा उदाहरण हैं. उन्होंने कई जिलों में मीलों दूर साइकिल चला कर किसानों के प्रति गांव की महिलाओं में अलख जगाई.

उन्होंने देखा कि किसानों के पास खेती के लिए कम जमीनें थीं. घरपरिवार का गुजारा मुश्किल से होता था, परिवार की स्थिति ठीक नहीं थी. ऐसे में किसान चाची ने पुरुषों को शहरों में जा कर नौकरी करने और महिलाओं को खेती करने का रामबाण नुसखा दिया.

महिलाओं ने उन 'चाची' की सलाह मानी. नतीजा यह निकला कि उन के घरों में महिलापुरुष दोनों कमाने के लिए सशक्त हुए. बिहार में किसान चाची के प्रयास से आज कई जिलों की महिलाएं खेती के काम करती हैं. महिलाओं में खेती के प्रति जगाए सशक्तीकरण को देखते हुए 2 साल पहले भारत सरकार ने उन्हें 'पद्म विभूषण' सम्मान से भी नवाजा.

ये सारे काम महिला किसानों के हवाले

हाल ही में 'फार्म एन फूड' पत्रिका द्वारा 'फार्म एन फूड किसान सम्मान' का आयोजन किया था, जिस में भारी तादाद में महिलाओं ने विभिन्न कैटीगोरियों में आवेदन किए थे. इस में खेतीकिसानी से जुड़े ऐसे काम भी रहे, जिस पर यह माना जाता है कि इन कामों को करने की कूवत केवल पुरुष किसानों में ही है. यह काम खेतीकिसानी से जुड़े बड़े कृषि यंत्रों के चलाने से जुड़ा है, जिसे महिला किसान बड़ी ही आसानी से संचालित कर रही हैं.

उत्तर प्रदेश के सहारनपुर जिले के कोठडी बहलोलपुर गांव की रहने वाली बेहद कम उम्र की शुभावरी चौहान न सिर्फ एक सफल किसान हैं, बल्कि वे अपने पिता के साथ मिल कर ट्रैक्टर से खेतों की जुताई भी करती हैं और कालेज जाने के लिए मोटरसाइकिल का इस्तेमाल करती हैं.

वर्तमान में शुभावरी चौहान अपने गांव से तकरीबन 45 किलोमीटर दूर सहारनपुर में 'मुन्ना लाल गर्ल्स डिग्री कालेज' में अपने बीए फाइनल ईयर की पढ़ाई कर रही हैं। उन का सालाना टर्नओवर 25 लाख रुपए है और वे 25-30 लोगों को रोजगार प्रदान करती हैं।

इसी तरह गांव कोटी अठरवाला, जिला देहरादून, उत्तराखंड की रहने वाली पशुपालक पुष्पा नेगी पशुपालन के क्षेत्र में नवीनतम तकनीक अपना कर स्थानीय किसानों को भी जागरूक करती हैं।

पशुपालक पुष्पा नेगी के द्वारा साल 2016 से गोपालन किया जा रहा है। इस समय उन के पास लगभग 30 गाय हैं, जिन में होल्सटीन फ्रीजियन और साहीवाल दोनों नस्ल की गाय शामिल हैं।

पुष्पा नेगी गाय के दूध से घी, छाछ, मक्खन आदि बना कर बाजार में अच्छे दामों पर बेचती हैं और प्रकृति संरक्षण को ध्यान में रखते हुए उन के यहां गाय के गोबर से दीया, दीपक, मूर्ति, समरानी कप, गौ काष्ठ एवं वर्मी कंपोस्ट आदि चीजें तैयार की जाती हैं। इस काम में उन्होंने अनेक लोगों को जोड़ रखा है, जिस से उन्हें भी रोजगार मिल रहा है।

गोंडा जनपद की रहने वाली साधना सिंह साल 2012 से कृषि क्षेत्र से जुड़ी हुई हैं। इस समय वे कृषि आधारित कई व्यवसाय भी कर रही हैं। उन्होंने 2 भैंसों के साथ पशुपालन का काम शुरू किया था और इस समय उन के पास 35 दुधारू भैंसें हैं। उन के दूध से पारंपरिक बिलोना विधि से भैंस का देशी घी तैयार किया जाता है, जो 'अवध गोल्ड' के नाम से बिकता है।

साधना सिंह के पास 2 पोल्ट्री फार्म हैं, जिस से उन्हें सालाना 7 से 8 लाख रुपए का मुनाफा होता है। इस के अलावा वे मछलीपालन व्यवसाय से भी जुड़ी हैं, जिस से उन्हें सालाना 10 लाख का लाभ प्राप्त होता है।

साधना सिंह का कहना है कि हम पंगास मछली का उत्पादन करते हैं। यह हाईडैसिटी में उत्पादन होने वाली मछली है, जिस से ज्यादा मुनाफा होता है। मछलीपालन में फायदा होते देख कई महिला किसानों ने मछलीपालन शुरू किया है, जिस से गांव में अनेक महिला किसान मछलीपालन से फायदा उठा रही हैं। इस के अलावा वे 40 एकड़ में गन्ने की खेती और 20 एकड़ में धान की खेती करती हैं। 2 एकड़ में वे जैविक खेती से धान और गेहूं उत्पादन करती हैं।

बस्ती जिले के बिहराखास गांव की रहने वाली पुष्पा गौतम कृषि उत्पादों जैसे मल्टीग्रेन आटा, चावल, चना, अचारमुरब्बा आदि की प्रोसेसिंग कर बाजार से कई गुना अधिक मुनाफा कमाने के साथसाथ अनेक लोगों को ट्रेनिंग व रोजगार भी दे रही हैं।

महिला किसानों को मिलेगी सही पहचान

महिला किसान अधिकारों पर काम करने वाली और एक सफल किसान माधुरी का कहना है कि खेतीकिसानी से जुड़ी ट्रेनिंग और अन्य क्षमतावर्धन गतिविधियों में महिला किसानों को

कम तवज्जुह दी जाती है। अगर सरकारी और गैरसरकारी लैवल पर आयोजित होने वाले इन कार्यक्रमों में महिला किसानों की भागीदारी बढ़ाई जाए, तो उन्हें असल पहचान मिल पाएगी।

वे कहती हैं कि परंपरागत रूप से महिलाओं को खेती में निराई, बोआई, रोपाई और कटाई जैसे काम सौंपे जाते थे। उत्पाद बेचना घर के पुरुष सदस्य का अधिकार होता था। वे पशुपालन जैसी सहायक गतिविधियों की देखभाल में भी शामिल थे। लेकिन अब यह सब बदल रहा है।

आज सरकार से इतर देश की कई गैरसरकारी संस्थाएं गांव की महिलाओं को कृषि व्यवसाय मॉडल पर शिक्षित कर के उन की प्रबंधन क्षमताओं को निखार रही हैं और नई आजीविकाओं में प्रशिक्षित कर रही हैं, जिस में खेती के अलावा ग्रेडिंग, सौर्टिंग, तौल, भंडारण, लोडिंग, अनलोडिंग, चालान और समन्वय रसद को प्रसंस्करण मिलों तक उत्पाद भेजने पर महिलाओं की क्षमता बढ़ाई जा रही है।

माधुरी बताती हैं कि एक अनुमान के मुताबिक भारत में तकरीबन 10 करोड़ महिलाएं खेती से जुड़ी हैं। लेकिन इन्हें महिला किसान न मान कर खेतिहर मजदूर माना जाता है।

वे कहती हैं कि छोटे और मझोले किसान घरों की तकरीबन 75 फीसदी महिलाएं खेती के कामों से तो जुड़ी हैं, किंतु आमतौर पर उन्हें उन के कामों का श्रेय नहीं दिया जाता है, न ही उन के हाथों में सीधी मजदूरी पहुंचती है और कई बार वे खेती से जुड़ी निर्णय प्रक्रिया से बाहर रहती हैं। वे खेती और परिवार से जुड़ी अपनी जिम्मेदारी एकसाथ निभाती हैं। लेकिन इन सब के बावजूद उन के योगदान का मूल्यांकन कहीं नहीं होता है।

बढ़ाया महिला किसानों के नाम खेती का रकबा

खेती की जमीन के मालिकाना हक के मामले में पुरुषों का दबदबा रहा है, लेकिन जब से 'पीएम किसान सम्मान निधि' योजना की शुरुआत हुई है, तब से घर के पुरुषों ने साल में मिलने वाले 6,000 रुपए के लालच में अपने घर की महिलाओं के नाम जमीन ट्रांसफर करना शुरू कर दिया।

अगर हम 'पीएम किसान सम्मान निधि' योजना के आंकड़ों पर गौर करें, तो 12.13 करोड़ पंजीकृत किसानों में 25 फीसदी हिस्सेदारी महिलाओं की है। पीएम किसान सम्मान निधि पोर्टल पर पंजीकृत महिला किसानों का यह आंकड़ा बहुत कम था, जो इस योजना के आने के बाद बढ़ा है।

इस के अलावा उत्तर प्रदेश की योगी सरकार ने जमीन नामांतरण प्रक्रिया में बड़ी सहूलियत दी है। इस के तहत उत्तर प्रदेश में अब कोई भी व्यक्ति 5,000 रुपए का स्टॉप शुल्क दे कर अपने परिजनों के नाम जमीन का बैनामा कर सकता है। इस स्कीम के चलते उत्तर प्रदेश में महिलाओं के नाम खेती योग्य जमीन के रकबे में बढ़ोतरी दर्ज की गई है।

महिला किसान (Woman Farmer) खेतीबारी से जुड़े आंकड़ों में भी महिलाएं

‘पीएम किसान’ पोर्टल पर महिला किसानों के जो आंकड़े प्रदर्शित हैं, भारत की जनगणना 2011 से बेहद कम है, क्योंकि साल 2011 की जनगणना के हिसाब से देश में तकरीबन 6 करोड़ महिला किसान हैं, वहीं आवधिक श्रमबल सर्वे 2018-19 का डेटा बताता है कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में 71.1 फीसदी महिलाएं कृषि क्षेत्र में काम करती हैं.

माधुरी कहती हैं कि 73.2 फीसदी ग्रामीण महिला श्रमिक किसान हैं, लेकिन उन के पास 12.8 फीसदी जमीन स्वामित्व है. महाराष्ट्र में 88.46 फीसदी ग्रामीण महिलाएं कृषि में लगी हैं, जो देश में सब से ज्यादा है.

साल 2015 की कृषि जनगणना के अनुसार, पश्चिमी महाराष्ट्र के नासिक जिले में महिलाओं के पास केवल 15.6 फीसदी कृषि भूमि का स्वामित्व है यानी कुल खेती वाले क्षेत्र में 14 फीसदी की हिस्सेदारी है.

वे बताती हैं कि संयुक्त राष्ट्र की साल 2013 की एक रिपोर्ट में कहा गया है कि जबरन बेदखली या गरीबी के खतरे को कम कर के, प्रत्यक्ष और सुरक्षित भूमि अधिकार महिलाओं की घर में सौदेबाजी की शक्ति को बढ़ाते हैं और उन की सार्वजनिक भागीदारी के स्तर में सुधार करते हैं.

माधुरी के अनुसार, महिलाओं को ‘महिला किसान’ के रूप में बनाई गई नीतियां नाकाफी हैं, इसलिए सरकार को इन नीतियों की समीक्षा कर उस में जरूरी सुधार कर के उस की सख्ती से पालन सुनिश्चित कराने की जरूरत है.



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<https://www.farmandfood.in/fasal/best-work-in-farming-yet-no-respect-for-being-a-woman-farmer>

State reassures protesting ASHAs...once again

By **Ritu Sharma and Swadesha Sharma**,
<https://ruralindiaonline.org/>



Thousands of ASHA workers – women health activists – from across 36 districts of Maharashtra have been rallying for better pay, given on-time, and an official order to that effect. Their recent protest in the city's Azad Maidan grounds went on for 21 days and was called off after the state announced that it would look into their demands. This is the third official assurance in the last six months, but the promises remain off paper. A story on International Women's Day about women, their solidarity and fight for their rights

It's 9 in the morning, and Azad Maidan in Mumbai is alive with young cricketers getting ready for a fun weekend game. There are frequent cries of joy and anguish as the game proceeds.

Barely 50 metres away, another 'game' proceeds silently with 5,000 participants. This one has been going on longer, the stakes are higher

and there is no end in sight for the thousands of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) – healthcare workers – protesting last month at Mumbai’s Azad Maidan. More than 50 women participants had to be hospitalised in the first week of the agitation, which began on February 9.

Within view of the busy road, an ASHA in her early 30s sits down on the ground. She glances around nervously, avoiding the stares of people passing by. A group of women gather around, covering her with *dupattas* and a *chadar* as she quickly changes her clothes.

A few hours later, at lunchtime, under the scorching midday sun, ASHAs gather around their colleague, Rita Chawre, each holding empty tiffin boxes, plates, and even lids. They patiently wait their turn as the 47-year-old serves them homemade food. “I manage to feed around 80-100 ASHAs protesting here,” says Rita who travelled around two hours to Azad Maidan daily from Tisgaon in Thane district, along with 17 other ASHAs.

“We are taking turns to ensure no ASHA remains hungry. But we are falling sick now. And we are tired,” she adds, speaking to PARI at the end of February 2024.



Thousands of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) were protesting last month at Mumbai’s Azad Maidan. Rita Chawre and 17 fellow ASHA workers from Kalyan commuted daily to Mumbai for 21 days to help feed as many as they could. Rita (right) became an ASHA in 2006 and serves a population of over 1,500 in Tisgaon, Maharashtra



ASHAs from 36 districts of the state had come together to protest; the many days and nights spent here took its toll, and many had to be hospitalised

After 21 days, the ASHAs finally went home on March 1 after the Chief Minister announced, “ASHA *chi nirasha sarkar karnar naahi*. [Government will not disappoint ASHAs].” The CM, Eknath Shinde, was speaking during the Maharashtra State Assembly’s Budget Session earlier that day.

ASHAs are an all-women workforce that provides more than 70 healthcare services. However, they are categorised only as ‘volunteers’

under the Integrated Child Development Services Program (ICDS) and National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). Hence, the payment they receive for providing healthcare services is referred to as an 'honorarium' and not wages or salary.

Apart from the honorarium, they are entitled to receive the PBP (performance-based payment or incentives). The NRHM states that ASHAs receive incentives based on their performance for promoting universal immunisation, services for Reproductive & Child Health (RCH) and other programmes.

Clearly the money is not enough as Rama Manatkar, one of the ASHAs, says, "*Bin pagari, full adhikari* [No money only responsibilities]! They expect that we work like officers, but are not willing to pay us."

The CM's recent assurance – one of many official ones in the last few months –has not resulted in a government resolution (GR), at the time of this story being published. By all appearances, the ASHAs continue to have only promises to go on.

The thousands of protesting ASHAs are determined to pin the Maharashtra administration to their assurance – first made in October 2023 – to issue a GR implementing a salary hike.



Left: Vanashree Fulbandhe from Nagpur has been an ASHA for 14 years. Right: ASHAs Priti Karmankar (extreme left) and Antakala More (extreme right) from Yavatmal district say they have not been paid since December 2023

“People trust ASHAs more than their own family! The health department is dependent on us,” says Vanashree Fulbandhe, also pointing out that a fundamental aspect of their role is facilitating access to healthcare services for marginalised communities. “Whenever there is a new posting of doctors, they ask: where is ASHA? Can we get her number?”

Vanashree has been an ASHA for 14 years. “I started with Rs 150...is this not like *vanvaas*? When Lord Shri Ram came to Ayodhya after 14 years, he was welcomed, wasn’t he? Do not welcome us but at least provide us a *maandhan* [honorarium] that will allow us to live with respect and honesty?” she adds.

And there’s another demand: could they please get their salaries on time every month like everyone else? And not after delays of three months each time.

“If we keep getting delayed payments, how will we manage?” asks ASHA, Priti Karmankar who is the District Vice President (*zilla upadhyaksha*) for Yavatmal. “An ASHA provides a service but she also works for her own stomach. If she’s not paid, how will she live?”

Even their travel reimbursements for mandatory workshops and district meetings organised by the health department, are delayed by three to five months. “We still haven’t received payments for programmes assigned by the health department since 2022,” says Antakala More from Kalamb in Yavatmal. “In December 2023,” she adds, “we were on strike. They made us end it to conduct a leprosy survey. But they still haven’t paid us.” Priti adds, “We didn’t even get the payment for last year’s polio, *hatti rog* [Lymphatic filariasis] and *jant-naashak* [deworming] programmes.”

Rita joined as an ASHA in 2006 at a salary of Rs. 500. “Today, I get Rs. 6,200/- rupees a month, of which Rs. 3,000/- comes from the central government and the rest from the municipal corporation.”

On November 2, 2023, the state health minister, Tanajirao Sawant had announced that the 80,000 ASHA workers and 3,664 *gat pravartaks* (group promoters) in Maharashtra would get increments of Rs. 7,000 and Rs. 6,200 respectively along with a Diwali bonus of Rs 2,000 each.



During the pandemic, ASHA workers were at the frontline of emergency care. Even though they were hailed as ‘corona warriors’, Mamta, an ASHA from Badlapur (seated on the right) says they received very limited protective gear



Left: Ujwala Padalwar (in blue), one of the protest organisers, said that although more than 50 women had to be hospitalised in the first week of the protest, many returned to Azad Maidan to continue their protest. Right: After days and nights at the protest, the ASHAs finally went home on March 1, 2024 when the Chief Minister said he would not disappoint them

A furious Mamta says, “Diwali houn aata Holi aali [Diwali has passed and it is time for Holi now] but we have nothing in our hand.” She adds, “We did not ask for 7,000 or 10,000 increment. Our initial strike in October was against the extra online work. We were told to get

100 villagers registered daily on the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY).”

The scheme, as its official website says, “provides a cash incentive for partial compensation of the wage loss during pregnancy.” A similar target was given for the newly launched U-Win app which aims to store vaccination records of pregnant mothers and children.

Earlier in February 2024, over 10,000 ASHAs had marched from Shahpur to the Thane District Collector’s office – a distance of 52 kilometres. “*Chalun aloy, tangdya tutlya* [We walked all the way, our legs gave out]. We spent the whole night on the streets of Thane,” recalls Mamta.

The months of protest are taking a toll on them. “Initially there were more than 5,000 ASHAs at the Azad Maidan. Many of them were pregnant and some also came with their newborns. It was getting difficult to live here in the open and so we requested them to go back home,” says Ujwala Padalwar. She is the State Secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and one of the organisers of the protests. Many women complained of chest and abdominal pain, others suffered from headache and dehydration and had to be hospitalised, she adds.

Once the ASHAs were discharged, they came back again to the ground, calling out in unison: “*Aata aamcha ekach naara, GR kaadha!* [We have only one call! Just release the GR!].”



In October 2023, the Maharashtra health minister had announced a Diwali bonus of Rs. 2,000 each. Mamta says, ‘Diwali has passed and it is time for Holi now but we have nothing in our hand’

On paper, an ASHA's role is to bring public health services to everyone. But after years of caring for the community, they often go above and beyond. Take ASHA Mamta, who in September 2023, managed to convince a pregnant Adivasi woman from Sonivali village in Badlapur to opt for hospital delivery instead of home birth.

She recalls: "The woman's husband refused to accompany her and said in clear words, 'if anything happens to my wife you will be responsible.'" When the mother was in labour, "I took her from Badlapur to Ulhasnagar all by myself," says Mamta. The mother did not survive the childbirth. The baby too had died in the womb.

Mamta explains, "I am a widow, my son was in Class 10 at that time. I left home at 6 a.m., and the mother passed away around 8 p.m. I was asked to wait in the hospital veranda till 1:30 a.m. After the *panchnama* was done they said, 'ASHA *tai* now you can go'. *Deed waajta me ektee jaau?* [Am I supposed to go home alone at 1:30 a.m.]"

The next day when she visited the village to update the records, some people including the woman's husband abused and blamed her for the deaths. A month later, Mamta was called for questioning by the *zilla samiti*. "They asked me 'how did the mother die and what error did ASHA *tai* make?' If everything at the end of the day has to be dumped on our heads, then why not increase our *maandhan?*" she asks.

Throughout the pandemic, the government praised the ASHA workers and hailed them "corona warriors" for their crucial role in distributing medicines and tracing infected patients from the remotest villages across the state. However, they barely received any safety gear to protect themselves from the virus.



On paper, an ASHA's role is to bring public health services to everyone. But after years of caring for the community, they often go above and beyond. Manda Khatan (left) and Shraddha Ghogale (right) started their journey as ASHA workers in 2010, and today they look after a population of 1,500 in Kalyan, Maharashtra

Manda Khatan and Shraddha Ghogale, ASHA workers from Nandivali Gaon in Kalyan recall their pandemic experience, "Once, a pregnant mother tested positive for covid after the birth. When she learned that she was infected with the virus, she panicked and ran away [with the newborn child] from the hospital."

"She thought she [and her baby] would be caught and killed," says Shraddha. Such was the fear and misconception around the virus.

"Someone told us that she was hiding in her home. We rushed to her house but she had locked the doors," says Manda. Fearing that she would take some wrong steps, they stood outside her house until 1:30 a.m. "We asked her, 'Do you love your baby or not?' We advised her that if she continued to keep the baby close to her, she would end up infecting it and would put the infant's life at risk."

After three hours of counselling, the mother opened the doors. "The ambulance was on standby. There were no other medical officers or *gram sevaks*, just the two of us." A teary-eyed Manda narrates, "Before departing the mother held my hand and said, 'I am leaving my child behind because I trust you. Please take care of my baby.' For the next eight days, we went to her home daily to bottle feed the newborn. We would show her the baby over video call. Till date, the mother calls us and thanks us.

“We distanced ourselves from our own kids for a year,” says Manda, “but we saved the children of other people.” Her child was in Class 8 while Shraddha’s was barely 5 years old.



Left: ASHA Shraddha had to interact with covid patients during the lockdown. She says she had to distance herself from her 5-year-old and family during that time. Right: Due to the lack of protective gear and masks, Rita (extreme left) tied her dupatta around her face to protect herself from the virus

Shraddha remembers when people in her village would shut their doors. “They would run away seeing us in personal protective equipment (PPE) kits thinking that we had come to catch them.” Not only that, “We would wear the kits for the whole day. Sometimes we had to change four in one day. Our face had turned black wearing them for hours. We would walk with them in the sun. It would itch and feel like a burning sensation on our skin.”

Manda interrupts and says, “But PPEs and masks came in much later. For most of the pandemic period, we would wrap our *pallus* and *dupattas* while moving around.”

“So, our lives did not have value then [during the pandemic]?” asks Mamta, “Did you give us some different *kavach* [protection] to battle corona? You [government] gave us nothing when the pandemic started. When our ASHA tais started getting covid, they faced the same fate as the rest of the patients. Even when the vaccines were at the trial stage, ASHAs were the first to volunteer.”

At one point in her life, Vanashree Fulbandhe had almost decided to quit being an ASHA. “It started to take a toll on my mental and physical health,” she says. The 42-year-old looks after a population of more than 1,500 people in Nagpur district’s Wadoda village. “I remember once I was in extreme pain due to kidney stones. I had tied a cloth around my waist and was still working.”

A patient and her husband came to Vanashree’s house, “She was a first-time mother. They were nervous. I explained to them I was not in a condition to do anything but they insisted that I be present during the birth. It was difficult to say ‘no’ so I went along with them. I stayed with her for two days in the hospital until the baby was born. Her relatives would see the cloth tied around my waist and jokingly ask me, “Is it the patient’s delivery or yours!”



Vanashree (with glasses) and Purnima left their villages in Nagpur on February 7, 2024 to join the protest in Mumbai. Vanashree talking to her family on the phone on the ninth day of the strike

She recalls her routine during the lockdown when she would complete her ASHA duties and deliver food to patients in isolation. “It eventually took a toll on my health. I had very high BP for many days and I thought maybe I should quit.” But Vanashree’s aunt reminded her that “what I am doing is *punya* [good deed]. She said two lives, [of the mother and child] depend on me. I should never leave this job.”

As she narrates the story, Vanashree briefly looks at her phone. She says, “My family keeps asking when I will return home. I came here

with Rs. 5,000. I barely have Rs. 200 now.” She hasn’t received her monthly honorarium since December 2023.

Purnima Wase, an ASHA from Nagpur’s Pandhurna village recalls a critical situation. “I had assisted an HIV positive woman in her childbirth. When people at the hospital found out she was HIV positive,” says the 45-year-old worker, “they acted as if it was a big thing. I told them, ‘When I, being an ASHA, delivered the baby without any equipment other than gloves and my own scarf, why should you act like this?’”

An ASHA since 2009, Purnima looks after a population of more than 4,500. “I am a graduate,” she says. “I get so many job offers. But, it was my decision to become an ASHA and I will continue to be an ASHA all my life. Whether I get money or not, *agar mujhe karni hai seva to marte dum tak ASHA ka kaam karungi* [Since I wish to serve, I will continue to be an ASHA until my death].”

The game of cricket continues at Azad Maidan. Meanwhile the ASHAs have moved their fight off the grounds.



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<https://ruralindiaonline.org/article/state-reassures-protesting-ashasonce-again>

The Start-up World: A New Age of Women **(Translated from Gujarati)**

By **Punita Vaidya**, Divya Bhaskar

Nine months ago, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry quietly dropped a statistic that spoke volumes. Of the 1,40,803 start-ups recognised by India's Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) as of 30 June 2024, nearly 67,500 had at least one woman director. Since 2016, these ventures have created over 1.55 million jobs.

Behind these numbers lies a transformation — the rise of women as builders of ideas, risk-takers, and employers. In India's buzzing start-up ecosystem, women are no longer on the margins. They are right at the centre, driving innovation, creating livelihoods, and reshaping the very idea of enterprise.

The Power of Possibility

Across the country, women entrepreneurs are proving to be formidable job creators. Their ventures have opened up thousands of opportunities, reducing unemployment and adding fresh dynamism to the economy.

But their impact goes beyond economics. Each story of a woman who dared to dream — and built something of her own — becomes a spark of inspiration for others. These women challenge stereotypes and reimagine what leadership can look like. They turn risk into resilience, and in doing so, create a culture of entrepreneurship that feels uniquely their own.

Goa: A Sisterhood of Start-ups

When one thinks of Goa, it's often beaches, music, and a carefree rhythm of life that come to mind. But look closer, and you'll find a quieter revolution unfolding — led by women.

The coastal state, once known primarily as a tourist haven, has emerged as a powerhouse for women-led start-ups. A third of all start-ups registered in Goa are helmed by women — more than 33%, nearly double the national average of 18%.

When asked why, women entrepreneurs point to a mix of freedom and practicality. Licences are easier to obtain, the environment is relaxed yet conducive to work, and perhaps most importantly, Goa's culture has long embraced gender equality more naturally than most Indian states. Here, women speak of being able to strike that elusive balance — of working hard without losing sight of life itself.

It helps that Goa boasts one of the highest female literacy rates in the country, third only to Kerala and Mizoram. The state government, recognising this momentum, now plans to introduce two women-centric schemes — a fellowship and a skill-upgradation programme — to support and scale these ventures. Of the 225 start-ups officially registered in Goa, 76 are run by women.

Goa, it seems, is not just India's party capital. It's fast becoming the country's start-up sisterhood.

Gujarat: The Spirit of Enterprise

If there's one Indian state synonymous with business acumen, it's Gujarat. Over the past nine years, India's start-up scene has expanded nearly 300-fold — from 350 in 2014 to over 90,000 today — making it the world's third-largest ecosystem after China and the United States.

Against this backdrop, Gujarat's position becomes particularly interesting. Official data shows 11,442 DPIIT-recognised start-ups in the state, of which 5,039 — about 44% — are led by women.

The state has backed this energy with policy. Its *Start-up Policy 2016–21* was designed to attract investment and nurture over 2,000 ventures with subsidies, tax exemptions, and innovation centres spread across districts. The central government's *Start-up India* initiative has also helped by easing patent procedures, offering funding support, and cutting through red tape. Together, these measures have created a fertile environment for entrepreneurship to take root.

Yet, even with this support, Gujarat finds itself fifth in the national ranking of states with the most start-ups — behind Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh. It's a reminder that while business may be part of Gujarat's DNA, the new wave of entrepreneurship is both broader and more democratised than ever before.

The Roadblocks Ahead

For all their success, women-led start-ups still face a familiar set of challenges. Access to funding remains a persistent struggle, with traditional banking systems slow to trust first-time entrepreneurs. Cash flow management can be a tightrope act, and nearly four in ten start-ups falter within their first year due to high operational costs.

The labyrinth of compliance and regulation often drains time and resources. And in sectors like technology and manufacturing, competition is fierce — with new ventures vying against established players for visibility and survival. For a young business seeking its place in the market, the climb can be steep.

The Geography of Change

Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat currently lead in the number of women-led start-ups. But the real story lies beyond the metros. Nearly half — 47% — of these ventures come from India's Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities. These are not inherited businesses or boardroom dreams — they are homegrown ideas, often born from lived experience and local need.

Powered by digital tools and direct-to-consumer (D2C) models, women from smaller towns are carving out their space in India's economic narrative. From fashion and food to fintech and sustainability, they are building brands that reflect both ambition and authenticity.

They are not just breaking into business — they are redefining it. And in doing so, they are rewriting one of India's most exciting new stories: that the future of enterprise, innovation, and leadership may well be feminine.

Because in today's start-up world, it truly is the age of women.



Punita Tejas Vaidya has over 23 years of experience across various newspapers and digital platforms and currently contributes to Gujarati Mid-Day.

Goa isn't just a party capital, it is a start-up hub too. And women are driving it

By **Manasi Phadke**, *theprint.in*

Goa is among India's top states for female-led startups, with over a third run by women—well above national average of 18%. Ease of doing business & work-life balance are big draws.



L-R: Goa-based entrepreneurs Snigdha Manchanda, Sunaya Shirodkar, Sapna Shahani, and Siya Shaikh | Illustration by Prajna Ghosh | ThePrint

Panaji: Thirty-nine-year-old Siya Shaikh doesn't take a single call after 6:30 pm, freeing up the evening for herself and her six-year-old child. Snigdha Manchanda, 40, savours her weekends with open-sea swimming, while Sapna Shahani, 40, spends three evenings a week playing football with her friends.

This isn't just a window into the leisurely life in Goa, India's party capital.

By day, Shaikh, Manchanda, and Shahani are all trailblazing start-up founders, running successful businesses in the tiny coastal state.

These three women, along with many others, are products of Goa's booming business ecosystem. Not just that, Goa is a frontrunner among Indian states when it comes to women-led businesses. Over a third of the state's startups are led by women, according to state government data. It's leagues ahead of the national average of 18 percent estimated in a 2023 report by venture capital non-profit ACT For Women.

Subverting its reputation as a siesta coast, Goa has surprised many by its climb in India's ease-of-doing-business rankings in recent years—jumping from 21st in 2016 to 16th in 2022. Women entrepreneurs say getting licences here is easier than many other states and that the cultural climate is friendly to both business and leisure.

Being closer to nature, surrounded by greenery, away from blaring sounds and lights, brings a sense of focus. I was working 16 hours a day but hardly felt it in my body or mind

-Sapna Shahani, founder of digital marketing company Blurbl

"Business and leadership come naturally to women in the Goan culture. Typically, the men go for work on cruises, while the women stay back home, running the family's shops and other small ventures," said Thejus Joseph, the interim chief executive of Forum for Innovation, Incubation, Research and Entrepreneurship (Fiire), a government-funded startup incubator in Goa. "It's an environment that encourages women leaders."

Many of these women entrepreneurs are not originally from Goa, but have chosen it as a business base, finding it easier to work in peace and thrive here. The fresh air, golden beaches, and dense forests are a welcome bonus. Some settle into a happy plateau here, while others expand their businesses beyond Goa.

"Goa offers a work-life balance. If I have a busy day, and I want to skip a business event that is not absolutely imperative to attend, I can. There's no rat race or a mad rush to fill every hour of the day doing something productive," said Sunaya Shirodkar, founder of Asier Solutions, a company that makes robotic kits and offers STEM learning activities for students.

While incubation centres across the country run accelerator programmes to fast-track startups, Goa is “almost like a de-accelerator” that ends up boosting productivity, according to Joseph. It’s a place where a long work day doesn’t wear out the mind, with the serene atmosphere and visual balm of nature making it easier to drown out the noise and create.

Moreover, entrepreneurs here also highlight that gender equality is more ingrained in Goan culture than in most other parts of India. The smallest Indian state, Goa has the third-best female literacy rate in the country, after Kerala and Mizoram. It also has a higher share of women-headed households than most other states. At 24 percent, Goa far surpasses the national average of 11.5 percent in rural areas and 12.5 percent in urban areas in this regard.

The stereotypical image of Goa’s ‘susegad’ ethos—laid-back and relaxed—does not translate to lackadaisical processes. Many women entrepreneurs report encountering fewer systemic hurdles here than in major business hubs like Bengaluru and Mumbai, including efficient approval and incentive-delivery mechanisms.



Entrepreneur and certified tea sommelier Snigdha Manchanda outside the Tea Trunk café in Panaji | Photo: Mansi Phadke | ThePrint

The very concept of *susegad* is misunderstood, pointed out Snigdha Manchanda, founder of Tea Trunk, a Panaji-based café and tea brand, with 20 Goans in her team of 21 employees.

“*Susegad* is actually quite different. Everyone knows that a finite amount of work has to be done, so like clockwork, at 9 am sharp, people are in office and at 6 pm they are out,” said Manchanda, a certified tea sommelier. “As a start-up founder, it helps me with my work-life balance as well. I don’t have to hang around in the office after 6 pm.”

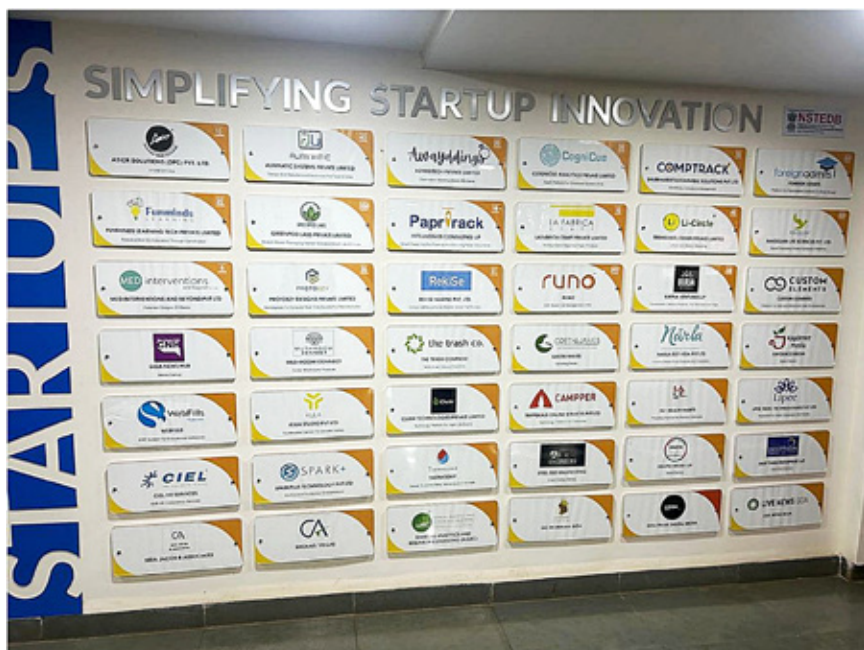
Goa’s flourishing landscape of female-led businesses has developed organically, without any special policies or incentives for women. The state government is only now catching up with this trend and owning it as The Goa Story.

Goa has 225 startups registered with the state government for availing incentives, of which 76, or over 33 per cent, are led by women entrepreneurs.

An organic launchpad for women

An eye-catching patchwork of colours, shapes, and fonts pops out from a wall in the entrance lobby of FiiRE at Don Bosco Engineering College in South Goa’s Fatorda. It’s not a decoration but a postcard from Goa’s bright business future—the logos of companies incubated here in the present or past, covering sectors ranging from food and handicrafts to engineering and e-commerce.

Joseph paused in front of the 42 logos, quickly pointing out about a dozen of them: a company making STEM learning kits, a wedding-planning enterprise, an international e-commerce platform for traditional Goan products, and a venture creating items from coconuts. Women lead all these businesses.



The wall of logos incubated at FiiRE | Photo: Manasi Phadke | ThePrint

“It was never a conscious decision to have a certain number of women entrepreneurs here. We didn’t even realise that we had organically drawn so many of them until the state government came out with its numbers. About a third of our incubatees are women-led businesses,” said Joseph, who moved from Hyderabad to Goa to be with his wife, a non-Goan dentist practicing in the coastal state.

Goa has 225 startups registered with the state government for availing incentives, of which 76, or over 33 per cent, are led by women entrepreneurs. Overall, the state is home to 445 startups certified by the central government’s Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

“Even if you look at the 445 companies from Goa certified as startups by the Centre, the proportion of women is about the same—30 per cent,” said Prashant DS, chief executive of Goa’s startup and IT promotion cell.

Goa's success on this front is not by design—at least not in terms of measures implemented specifically for women. But stakeholders laud the Goa government's overall startup policies. For instance, the startup cell has schemes to reimburse 50 per cent of R&D expenses, 100 per cent of application expenses for intellectual property rights, and 50 per cent of seat costs in co-working spaces. It also provides salary reimbursements for startups employing local Goans and freshers.

As businesses mature, they may move to other metros, but when it comes to building a product, women feel safe and find it convenient to settle down here

-Prashant DS, chief executive of Goa's startup and IT promotion cell

While female-led startups have taken advantage of these schemes, none are exclusive to women. That may soon change. Building on its accidental success, Prashant said the state government is now considering rolling out two women-focused schemes: a fellowship for startups and a skill upgrade programme.

A little after 6 pm on a Wednesday, 36-year-old Shirodkar winds down on the first-floor verandah outside her office at FiiRE, cradling a hot coffee. She talks about how her passion was creating, but she had no knowledge of running a business. The assistance from FiiRE and the global platform Business Networking International helped her set up Asier Solutions. In three years, Asier has progressed from making three product kits to eleven and now has ambitions of setting up robotics and STEM learning labs in Goa's schools.

"Women have to put in just as much effort in applying for (startup) benefits as men do. Throughout my journey, nobody in Goa has ever seen me as a woman entrepreneur. In the eyes of everyone who has facilitated my journey, I have just been a startup, not a woman-led startup. It makes you feel like an equal," she said.

Shirodkar is soft-spoken and mild-mannered, but at work, she deftly manages an all-male team. Women, according to her, tend to be better lateral thinkers than men.

"I can deal with a new marketing pitch, correspond with schools on our STEM curriculum, handle technical glitches, help with a community college set-up, network outside to grow the company, and give media

interviews all in a day's work without getting flustered," Shirodkar said. "We women are natural multi-taskers. The men, on the other hand, handle things task by task."

Shirodkar, a former teacher in an engineering college, was born and brought up in Goa and completed all her education here too. She has big dreams. She wants to have an Asier Solutions centre in every major Indian metropolis and eventually take her business with Goan roots global.

A magnet for settlers

In a cosy corner of Panaji's quaint Fontainhas neighbourhood, Manchanda cheerfully greets her employee at the entrance of her Tea Trunk café. Savouring a guava cheese chocolate chip cookie served by her staff, she says she initially wanted to start her business in her home city Mumbai, but was discouraged by the process of getting a license from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

"I knew how hard it was in Mumbai. And to get that license, as a solo woman founder, I couldn't see myself going to the office and sitting there for hours," she said. "Then, because it is a product business the warehouse was going to be in Bhiwandi because that's all I could afford. I thought, okay, this does not work, I am not going to have an office in Bhiwandi and I am not sitting outside the FSSAI office for hours."

On a whim, she applied for an FSSAI license in Goa, where the application was available online even 12 years ago. Within a week, she received a call from the regional office saying her licence was ready and asking for an address to deliver it.

"That's when I decided to move to Goa. I set up my business, got a trade licence, and institutionalised Tea Trunk. There are quite a few women entrepreneurs here—probably because of the ease of doing business," Manchanda said, sipping on one of her brews.

On a Thursday afternoon, two tourists were tasting craft teas at a corner table under lights hanging from wooden rafters. A local singer strummed her guitar, crooning 'Maria Pitache', a Konkani song.

Manchanda pointed out it's highly unlikely that she would have been able to create such an inviting space in Mumbai.

We go to the beach either on Saturday or Sunday and walk for long hours. I can run a company and still peacefully do that without the threat of being pulled into a work crisis.

-Sunaya Shirodkar, founder of Asier Solutions

Opening a cafe and a restaurant had followed as a natural next step to her products business and getting all the clearances and permits was a hassle-free experience in Goa, she said.

Having reached a ceiling in Goa, Tea Trunk is now expanding to Bengaluru. However, Manchanda noted that the same processes that she had to go through in Goa are turning out to be comparatively cumbersome in Karnataka.

There are no official statistics on this, but there are many like Manchanda who have found the perfect calm environment to nurture and grow their businesses in Goa. They are challenging the notion that the hustle culture of big cities is the spark needed to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit.



Shahani at work amid lush surrounds | Photo: Instagram/@alternist

“Startups across the country have set up in Goa because the ecosystem allows that kind of opportunity for people. We find a lot of people who are coming to Goa, settling down here and starting businesses,” Prashant said.

A large number of these businesses, he added, make women-centric products, like beauty and wellness items or handicrafts.

“As businesses mature, they may move to other metros, but when it comes to building a product, women feel safe and find it convenient to settle down here,” Prashant added.

Among these businesses is WebN, a networking platform for women entrepreneurs. Siya Shaikh, who was born and raised in Goa, started the platform in 2018. It now has 110 members across four chapters in the state, with the women entrepreneurs helping each other with referrals, networks, skills, and experiences.

“At WebN, 70 percent of the members are settlers in Goa. They are very passionate about their work, enthusiastic, creative minded, and learners. They are generating a lot of employment for the people of Goa. With over 110 members, the collective business that we have done so far is about Rs 15 crore,” said Shaikh, adding WebN now has a turnover of about Rs 8-9 lakh a year.



Siya Shaikh (fifth from right) at a networking event | Photo: Facebook/@Siya Shaikh

Shaikh's first business was a network marketing company in Pune, which shut down when she returned to Goa to get married. She then dabbled in manufacturing fibre doors, even setting up a small factory, before finding her true calling: connecting small women-led businesses, from tailoring to pickle-making, to each other and to potential clients.

With this intention, she started GoWomaniya in 2016. The idea for WebN came as an extension of her work for small-scale, household businesses.

These platforms have boosted women entrepreneurship in Goa, Shaikh claimed.

"The '*main bhi kar sakti hun*' (I can also do it) mindset has come because of the community," she said.

Goa's charm and facilitative startup ecosystem come with some trade-offs, the biggest being shortfalls in basic hard infrastructure.

Infra hiccups vs work-life balance

About three years ago, Sapna Shahani, originally from Mumbai but now settled in the idyllic North Goa village of Parra, got a surprise call from a consultant working with the Goa government. It was some free advice to turn her small business into a private limited company so she could tap into various state government schemes.

This is how Shahani, who runs Blurb, a digital marketing company with several Goan restaurants and hotels as clients, got on the official startup grid.

A large number of businesses in Goa are not registered with the government. But in the past few years, the state government has been pushing to bring these founders into the fold, making them part of Goa's success story, and helping them take advantage of various startup schemes. They are, after all, Goa's new ambassadors.

After registering, Shahani got reimbursements for some of the salary payments she had made for the locals and freshers she'd hired.

“In the middle of the pandemic, the money came as a breather,” Shahani said.

But Goa’s charm and facilitative startup ecosystem come with some trade-offs, the biggest being shortfalls in basic hard infrastructure.

“Whether it is power supply, or water supply, we have to put in additional efforts to get the basic facilities that the government is expected to provide,” Shahani said.

Almost on cue, her roof starts leaking as the rain finds a gap between the red bricks and a glass skylight, dripping from over her coffee table to the floor. The lights go off for a minute before the inverter kicks in. On the other side of her home office, her three employees continue clicking away on their laptops. It’s business as usual.

The Blurb team at work in Sapna Shahani’s home office | Photo: Manasi Padke | ThePrint

That same afternoon, the washroom at Tea Trunk was out of order due to a water supply issue.

But Shahani and Manchanda were hardly perturbed. For them, the perks of working in Goa still outweigh the inconveniences.

“Being closer to nature, surrounded by greenery, away from blaring sounds and lights, brings a sense of focus. When I first moved to Goa, I was running a project teaching women across the country how to run video blogs. I was working 16 hours a day but hardly felt it in my body or mind,” Shahani said.

She says she is grateful for being able to run a successful company and still hit the football field three days a week at 6 pm. All this while also working on another startup idea—a matchmaking business with a co-founder from a tech background.

Shaikh, a single parent, values the fact that she can leave the office at 12:30 pm, pick up her son from school, take him home, feed him, settle him down, and be back in the office by 3:30 pm every day.

Manchanda, too, revels in escaping the corporate grind of Mumbai, with entertainment limited to weekend outings to malls, cinemas, and restaurants. Swimming alongside dolphins and spotting jellyfish is far more satisfying.

As for Shirodkar, the family's primary breadwinner since her father's death 16 years ago, cherishes her evenings. She's home to her mother by 6.30 or 7 pm, and on weekends upholds a "quintessential Goan family tradition" — a long walk on the beach.

"We go to the beach either on Saturday or Sunday and walk for long hours together," Shirodkar said. "I can run a company and still peacefully do that without the threat of being pulled into a work crisis."

(Edited by Asavari Singh)



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She currently serves as a Deputy Editor at The Print.

<https://theprint.in/ground-reports/goa-isnt-just-a-party-capital-it-is-a-start-up-hub-too-and-women-are-driving-it/2170562/>

Why A Robust Gig Work Legislation Will Help Women Workers

By *Shreehari Paliath, Indiaspend.com*



Bengaluru: In June, Bengaluru witnessed a protest by aggregator platform Urban Company's women workers in the beauty segment, categorised as 'partners' or 'independent contractors' by the gig economy.

The protest mostly stemmed from the company's decision to bring in new terms of service without consulting workers which impacted their ability to remain flexible, a much touted benefit reiterated by the gig economy. Later the same month, following along the lines of Rajasthan's legislation that was passed in July 2023, the state government invited suggestions on the Karnataka Platform Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2024.

Varsha*, a beautician with the platform for over four years, was worried after her access to the platform--or her 'ID'--was blocked when **IndiaSpend** met her in mid-July. A veteran with experience of more than a decade, she had earlier run a salon which she was

forced to shut due to the Covid lockdown and reduced footfalls. Now a gig worker, she was not sure how long she could sustain given the company's decision to auto-assign jobs on behalf of workers without their approval or choice.

"We do not [presently] get leave like employees do. I had a few cancellations due to health and personal reasons, and now I have been blocked," said Varsha, a premium Luxe category worker in the beauty segment who was worried about not getting work on the platform. Work-related tension and anxiety was a factor for her ill health, she said.

Two other colleagues from West Bengal, Seema* and Sindhu*, have quit the platform due to the difficulty they face in finding resolution to problems like ID blocking, and the prospect of being auto-assigned work. Seema is a single mother who joined the platform in 2016 when it was called Urban Clap while Sindhu, who joined in 2020, has a young child. The promise of flexible work hours and a decent living wage in an expensive metropolis like Bengaluru lured them into gig work.

While women partners in the beauty segment said that they were initially "very happy" with the earnings, they say it has become stressful to sustain work over the last 12 to 18 months. Women in gig work are earning more and are able to choose their working hours while working with online platforms, **IndiaSpend** reported in January 2021. But this comes with limited social benefits and less bargaining power as age-old issues of occupational segregation and gender pay gaps follow women into the new platform-based gig economy.

The lack of robust legislation on new forms of labour and employment like gig and platform work, which needs to go beyond issues of social security, have an impact on gig workers--particularly women who have to struggle to remain in the labour force and earn a living wage. With the gig workforce expected to expand to 23.5 million workers by 2029-30, a three-fold increase from 2020-21, experts feel that more states will have to regulate work which falls outside the traditional employer-employee ambit of the organised workforce.

Work around labour rights

The government's eShram portal registers unorganised workers but it does not capture gig worker data separately. There are 1.2 million beauticians and related workers, per the portal's data. Although this number may not represent the entire universe of workers in the segment, it indicates the scale of employment in a segment that primarily employs women. Urban Company says 40% of their partners are women, and almost all of them work in the beauty category.

A June 2024 blog post by the company mentions the "new order scheduling system" which includes auto-assigning customer orders to partners in their indicated available time slots. It includes three "emergency passes a month". It also mentions additional flexibility for women partners. "To support them better, we typically offer greater flexibility to them, including offering a 'flexi-partner model' which allows a sizable percentage of our women partners to operate without the above restrictions," it said.

After Sindhu's mother-in-law passed away a few years ago, her husband decided to quit his retail job to take care of their three-year-old child. "I was earning more than him so we decided that I should work. But lately, earnings have fallen by half and what I finally got in hand after tax at source, payment for [UC] products, travel cost etc. is simply inadequate," she said. Her husband has started working again recently, after a relative decided to help out with the child, but they are worried about having to go back to one of them working when the relative decides to leave.

Sindhu had to cancel work during her child's school admission, which eventually led to the company blocking her ID, she said. "They call us partners, but they do not treat us as partners. If we are a partner we should get some benefits [of a partner]. We are like employees, but without any benefits."

Her friend Seema, who has joined another platform, admitted her pre-teen son to a school in West Bengal because there was no one at home to take care of him when she was away for work. "They told me that my ID would be unblocked, but there was no progress for a month even after I visited the office and contacted them multiple times. I had no choice but to leave as I was not earning anything and had no savings."

According to a January 2024 analysis of government data by Ashoka University's Centre For Data and Economic Analysis, 72.2% of men and 23.4% of women in the 20-24 years age-group were part of the labour force in 2022-23. The gender gap in the labour force participation rate widens in the 20-29 years age-group, where women are most likely to get married and have their first child, it said.

Among previously employed women who are now out of the labour force in the 365 days before the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-23, one in 10 women report child care as the reason for exiting the workforce, as **IndiaSpend** reported in August 2024. Among mothers with at least one child, two in five women report childcare as the main reason.

"Calling gig workers as 'partners' instead of 'workers' is a cunning sleight of hand and puts a warm and fuzzy feel-good cover to a new form of digital feudalism," said Rajendran Narayanan, faculty at the Bengaluru-based Azim Premji University.

According to a 2024 International Labour Organization report on platform workers, even as the platform economy gets poised to catalyse economic growth and boost employment levels in the country, life in the platform economy for many workers continues to be precarious, without adequate economic and social security.

Workers said that since Covid-19, there have been financial constraints for the family. Varsha, who started as a Salon Classic Partner and moved to Prime and then Luxe category, said that she may have invested around Rs 1.3 lakh for training and products for each segment over the last four years. She has loans to repay, and even had to pawn her husband's ring to meet costs. Her husband works as a driver. These categories do not provide any incentive for her, she claimed. Workers have to buy Urban Company brand products and scan it each time they use it to maintain a predetermined product score.

Despite guaranteed earnings, what workers get in hand is lower than before. Some said they have earned more than Rs 1 lakh a month earlier, but it is not the same anymore. "If I get a job lead [on the platform] for Rs 800, after my travel costs have increased since auto-assign, commission and TDS, I may get Rs 400," said Varsha.

Grievances are not addressed

Gig workers often work more than the ILO-mandated eight hours a day or 48 hours a week. Extended work hours are fairly common in India where 90% of workers are informal. Women workers that **IndiaSpend** spoke to said that on weekends, they would work up to 13 hours, which includes travel time to customer's homes or locations and providing the requested service. It is the busiest time of the week, and offers the most opportunity to earn.

But the pressure of maintaining ratings, accepting auto-assigned jobs, having to travel 10-15 km at their own expense, and the possibility of last minute cancellations at customers' doorstep leading to loss of earnings were significant problems. Rude customers or demand for unreasonable and additional services at discounted rates or even free services are part of the problem. Refusal annoys customers, which translates into bad ratings, workers said.

According to Urban Company's terms and conditions, workers' rankings are based on the "descending order of importance": ratings on the platform, location, number of leads that they have accepted or their response rate to these leads.

Urban Company beauticians said that they were ranked as Gold, Silver or Bronze, with each category requiring that the 'partners' maintain a specific rating, limit to a set number of cancellations, maintain weekend hours and a product score. The rewards for each rank category include immunity from blocking for 30 to 60 days, loans up to Rs 40,000, and family health insurance of Rs 2 lakh for Gold partners.

But Nakshatra, who is a Gold partner in the Prime category and a beautician for over 14 years, had her ID blocked because she "had done offline booking", said the platform application. The app prompts her to go to the training centre to book a training slot and get the ID unblocked. "My phone was switched off and they decided that I am doing offline jobs," she said. If they switch off location, the app's built-in voice prompt tells them to keep the GPS switched on to continue getting jobs. Workers said that this was intrusive, particularly when they travel for personal reasons.

Her colleague and friend Selvy, who also protested in June and coordinated with workers, said that grievance redressal was a problem that needed to be addressed, particularly because they work at customer's homes. "I have had awkward experiences where the customer's spouse was in the same room when we were waxing," said Selvy. "If we complain, then customers are rude and give a bad rating that affects our ranking. And the helpline is not at all helpful."

"Even if the client cancels, the fault is put on us because the company will not question the client," said Nakshatra. "They casually ask me to do 50 jobs to reverse the cancellation--which means, if I have another emergency and [have to] cancel a job again, I have to do 100 jobs?"

All workers that we spoke to said that they have some form of loan that they have to repay, either acquired from the platform or from relatives. Returning to work in a salon was not viable anymore due to the limited flexibility and lower earnings for nine to 10 hours of work.

In 2023, Fairwork India's analysis ranked 12 platforms for the work conditions of platform workers based on five principles: fair pay, conditions, contracts, management and representation. Big Basket was ranked at the top with six points of a total of 10, while four platforms including Urban Company received five points.

No platform ticked the second point of the Fair Pay principle, which requires platforms to provide sufficient evidence that workers earn at least the local living wage, said the report. "However, Urban Company has made a public commitment to ensure that its workers earn at least the local living wage after factoring in work-related costs," it said.

"If you look at the protests, it is clear that the workers' issues are not individual grievances," said Janaki Srinivasan, co-investigator for the Fairwork project in India. "Complaints pertaining to the process of escalating grievances, or about arbitrary changes to commission rates, are collective issues workers face."

While platforms may have processes to address individual grievances, these can be onerous and don't always lead to resolutions that workers are satisfied with, she said.

In June 2024, UC founder Abhiraj Singh Bhal is reported to have said, "We are always open to talking to partners one-on-one and explaining

our rationale. But we will not talk to people outside the UC community. We don't recognize them and have no relation with them."

IndiaSpend wrote to Urban Company for their comment on the new terms and conditions for their partners, the issue of grievance redressal and consultations before making decisions, welfare support for women workers, blocking of IDs, and their response to the Karnataka draft bill on gig workers' social security. We will update the story when we receive a response.

Fairwork India ratings showed that no platform scored a point for Fair Representation, which recognises workers' collective voices and freedom to form an association. Despite multiple instances of workers' protests and strikes across the country and the many legislative changes within the platform economy in 2023, platforms in India have remained unwilling to systematically recognise or negotiate with workers' collectives, said the report.

Selvy feels that once the state legislation is passed, gig workers like her can demand labour rights better. "We go to people's homes [unlike Uber or Ola drivers]. We depend on trusting customers and if there are issues, women find it difficult to discuss with family for fear of being asked to stop work."

Legislation on gig work

As Covid hit the economy and impacted employment and labour, the Union government passed four labour code bills, including three on the same day, in September 2020. The Social Security Code, 2020 was the only one which made a mention of gig work-related social security. But as of now, none of the codes have been implemented.

Although the Social Security code has not come into force, it gives states scope to create a welfare board and register workers and aggregators. "The legislation [will] provide the right [of workers] to be recognised and not be a company's database. Grievances will have to be addressed by a third party, which aggregators were unhappy about," said Rakshita Swamy, founder and director of Social Accountability Forum for Action and Research, who was involved in consultations of the bill.

IndiaSpend has written to the labour ministry for their comments on the implementation of codes, their concerns about state legislations on gig work, and the support for women workers in the gig economy. We will update this story when we receive a response.

Rajasthan became the first state in India to pass a gig workers welfare bill. The law mandates a tripartite platform-based gig workers welfare board, tasked with social security for gig workers, registration of workers and aggregators, and ensuring welfare fee deduction mechanism is integrated into the aggregators platform, among others. Other states like Karnataka, Telangana and Jharkhand have also followed up with state specific draft bills and policy.

The Rajasthan Act and the Karnataka bill are futuristic, keeping in mind that the scale of gig work will increase over the next few years, said Swamy. The Rajasthan version has a tripartite board, automatic registration, transaction-based welfare cess, grievance mechanism and a central transaction information and management system, while Karnataka also added algorithmic accountability, fair contract, income security and occupational safety. “This enters regulation while Rajasthan is on social security. We made the remit narrow in Rajasthan instead of an omnibus legislation which would find resistance from aggregators,” she said.

But there have been concerns about the clarity on defining ‘employee’ and ‘employer’ in the case of gig workers who, as we said, fall outside the norm of traditional labour legislation.

“If employer relation is defined all existing laws become applicable. In addition to the welfare board, states can have dispute resolution, if possible through the Industrial Disputes Act which will solve a lot of issues,” said Kingshuk Sarkar, a labour economist and faculty at the Goa Institute of Management, who was a labour administrator in West Bengal for two decades.

Currently, the gig model is an exploitative model, said Sarkar, and added that the Karnataka bill is a small improvement over the Rajasthan Act. “The advantage for the company is that they can deny the employer-employee relation and the worker may not necessarily make an adequate income despite completing multiple tasks.”

Swamy said that the issue of employer-employee terminology is that we are not operating on a clean slate given that we have a Social Security code. “The Union government has defined gig work as those outside the traditional employer-employee relationship,” she said. “So definition in state laws had to be written in a way that it did not conflict with the Union government laws.”

Labour laws are on the concurrent list. While states and the Union government can frame laws, certain matters are reserved for the Union.

Industry was not pleased with parts of the Karnataka bill. National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom), the apex tech industry body, responded to the bill, highlighting that the assumption the bill makes that gig work is like the traditional employer-employee system “risks unsettling the conceptual and legal basis of gig work”.

It also said “onerous and prescriptive obligations” like minimum notice period for termination, algorithmic disclosures, monitoring and tracking mechanism and laying down terms of template contract etc. are “incompatible with the functioning of gig platforms and can adversely impact their operations in the state”.

G. Manjunath, additional labour commissioner (industrial relations) in Karnataka, told **IndiaSpend** that industry has always fought for their requirements and agenda, and a few aggregators cannot manoeuvre hundreds of thousands of gig workers. On the criticism that it explicitly does not define ‘employer’ and ‘employee’, he said that “Under Industrial Disputes Act, an industry is a systematic activity carried by the employer and employee. Gig economy is also a systematic activity carried out between aggregators and gig workers. Can anyone deny it?”

IndiaSpend has previously reported on issues faced by gig workers and highlighted the precarity of work and lack of social security. You can read some of the stories [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Global recognition of gig workers

In 2021, the UK Supreme Court decided that Uber drivers were entitled to rights as workers, including minimum wage and paid holidays. In January, *Reuters* reported that the US had issued a rule that “will force companies to treat some workers as employees rather than less expensive independent contractors”. The EU Parliament voted to improve gig workers’ work conditions, including a new directive where workers “cannot be fired based on a decision taken by an algorithm or an automated decision making system”. Platforms will be obliged to inform workers about the use of algorithms and automated systems in decisions regarding their recruitment, their working conditions and their earnings among other things, said an April 2024 EU Parliament post.

In a 2019 interview with **IndiaSpend**, Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz said while there are efficiencies that the gig economy can bring, “...the business model is driven by exploitation and circumvention. We have to maintain the advantages the model offers but at the same time restore more bargaining power and regulate the bad aspects.”

In 2021, a Public Interest Litigation was filed in the Supreme Court by the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) to recognise gig workers as unorganised workers so that they can be entitled to benefits under the existing legislation for unorganised workers. It is still pending.

Algorithmic transparency for gig workers has so far been discussed by the EU, and transaction-based welfare fee and tripartite welfare boards for gig workers are unique to the Rajasthan and Karnataka legislations, said Srinivasan. “How an algorithm is decided on, or how it is made transparent to workers, are not easy questions to answer. Algorithms operate as a black box,” she said.

However, the workers have a right to know the factors that lead to them being allocated specific jobs and the factors are dynamic and vary between platforms.

“Additionally, if the algorithm blocks a worker’s ID, or if it affects a worker’s rating, she often will only have a call back option for getting the issue resolved,” she said.

Narayanan feels that the UK verdict was a landmark and India should aim to emulate it. Gig workers are subject to enormous digital surveillance and control, and having a law with a welfare board involving representation from various workers organisations, trade unions, civil society organisations, government, is of utmost importance.

“Importantly, the algorithms used by the aggregators must be subject to a ‘fairness audit.’” he added.

Legislation will help in establishing conditions for women, said experts, including Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (POSH), maternity benefits, creche etc. “Gig work does not come under any labour jurisdiction including POSH. Aggregators believe customers are right and there is no challenge to it. Self regulation does not work,” said Swamy.

For women gig workers in Bengaluru, it is business as usual for now. The state government has put the bill for consultation with other departments after two other labour bills--on reservation in the private sector and increasing daily work hours to 14 hours in the IT sector--faced backlash from the industry and IT workers.

**Names of workers have been changed to protect their identity.*



Shreehari Paliath reports on labour, migration, criminal justice, and public policy. He was a 2023 MSF Without Borders Media Fellow and a finalist for the 2024 Human Rights and Religious Freedom Journalism Awards and the 2023 Red Ink Awards.

<https://www.indiaspend.com/womenwork/why-a-robust-gig-work-legislation-will-help-women-workers-920675>

UN heard,
written,
told...

II.

Violence & Systemic Injustice

Confronting the physical, structural, and societal violence faced by women and marginalised genders.

Violence against women and marginalised genders is not confined to dark alleys or headlines. It seeps insidiously into homes, customs, and institutions — often cloaked as honour, sanctified as tradition, or dismissed by those tasked with upholding justice. This section confronts that everyday brutality in all its forms: from the witch-hunting and “honour” killings that still claim women’s lives, to the superstitions and social codes that turn communities into enforcers of silence. Through these stories, we witness not just the physical harm inflicted, but the deep psychological and social scars left by systems that continue to privilege control over compassion.

In exploring these accounts — of intimate partner violence and marital rape, of online abuse and institutional apathy — we see how power and prejudice perpetuate a continuum of harm. Yet, in each act of testimony lies defiance: journalists, survivors, and communities choosing to name what has long been hidden. Together, these narratives insist that violence is not inevitable — it is constructed, and therefore, it can be dismantled. Naming it is the first step towards breaking it.

The Brutality of 'Tradition':

Exposing honour killings, witch-hunting, and oppressive customs.

1. **Babu Lal Naga** - “इज्जत” के नाम पर भेंट चढ़ती जिंदगियां
2. **Sasmita Sahoo** - Witch-Hunting: Myths, Misconceptions and Misery, A Witch doctor creates witches

When Institutions Fail: Investigating police apathy, negligent systems, and barriers to justice.

1. **Rokibuz Zaman** - How a Guwahati DJ Was Held Captive by Her Family to Stop Her Marriage to a Muslim Man
2. **Nidhi Suresh** - Hostage in Hathras: Four Years Later, Dalit Victim's Family Still Awaits Relocation and Justice

“इज्जत” के नाम पर भेंट चढ़ती जिंदगियां

By *Babu Lal Naga, Bharat Update*

राजस्थान के झालावाड़ जिले के जावर थाना क्षेत्र में 4 जुलाई 2024 को ऑनर किलिंग का एक सनसनीखेज मामला सामने आया है। प्रेम विवाह से नाराज लड़की के परिजनों ने पहले उसका अपहरण किया। बाद में उसके साथ मारपीट की और मौत के घाट उतार दिया। मृतका के पति की शिकायत के बाद बारां जिले की हरनावदा पुलिस ने मृतका के परिजनों के खिलाफ मामला दर्ज कर जांच शुरू कर दी है। युवक रवि भील और युवती शिमला कुशवाह ने परिजनों की मर्जी के खिलाफ जाकर प्रेम विवाह किया था। विवाह के बाद से ही शिमला के परिजन दोनों से नाराज चल रहे थे। विवाह के बाद रवि और शिमला बारां जिले के हरनावदा में रह रहे थे। 4 जुलाई को शिमला बैंक से पैसे निकालने के बहाने बाजार गई हुई थी। इस दौरान उसके परिजनों ने उसे अकेला पाकर पहले उसका अपहरण कर लिया। बाद में उसे गांव लाकर उसके साथ जमकर मारपीट की। इससे शिमला की मौत हो गई।

हमारा देश अभी भी जाति-धर्म, जाति पंचायतों के गैर संवैधानिक और अमानवीय फैसलों के साए में जी रहा है। देश में जातिगत धारणाएं बलवती होती जा रही है। ‘ऑनर किलिंग’ के नाम पर युवा युगल जोड़ियों को मारने की घटनाओं का होना अत्यंत शर्मनाक है। झूठी शान के लिए की जाने वाली ऑनर किलिंग बर्बर, सामंती परंपरा वाली और राष्ट्र के लिए एक कलंक है। अधिकांश ऑनर किलिंग के मामले तथाकथित उच्च और नीची जाति के लोगों के प्रेम संबंध के मामले में देखने को मिले हैं। कभी अंतरजातीय विवाह, कभी सगोत्र में विवाह और कभी सवर्णों से विवाह के कारण परिवार अपनी नाक बचाने के लिए ऐसे युवा लड़के-लड़कियों को मौत के घाट उतार देते हैं। इससे पहले कि मामला पुलिस तक पहुंचे, जाति पंचायत ही प्रेमी युगलों के खिलाफ फरमान जारी कर देती है। कि अपनी इज्जत के लिए अपने ही अपनों की जिंदगी खत्म कर रहे हैं। हत्या करने वालों में पिता, चाचा, भाई और सगे अन्य रिश्तेदार शामिल हैं।

आज ऑनर किलिंग के बढ़ते मामले कानून के राज को चुनौती देने वाले बन चुके हैं। राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो (एनसीआरबी) के नवीनतम आंकड़ों के अनुसार, भारत में 2014 से 2021 तक रिपोर्ट की गई ऑनर किलिंग की संख्या 492 थी। लेकिन ये आंकड़े रिपोर्ट किए गए आंकड़ों पर आधारित हैं और यह संख्या बताई गई संख्या से कहीं अधिक हो सकती है। इस तरह की एकाध घटनाएं होतीं तो उसकी भ्रमना भर की जा सकती थी लेकिन घटनाओं की पुनरावृत्ति के चलते अब ये मामले कानून के लिए बेहद खतरनाक हो चुके हैं। ‘सम्मान बचाने के लिए’ हत्याओं से जुड़े मसले अब तक हरियाणा की खाप पंचायतों में ही देखे जाते रहे हैं, जहां जातिगत पंचायतें कानून व्यवस्था को धता बताते हुए इस तरह के फैसले सुनाती रही हैं। लेकिन अब केवल हरियाणा राज्य में ही नहीं होता देश के अन्य राज्यों से भी जाति और गोत्र

के बंधन या परिपाटी से परे जाकर विवाह करने वाले प्रेमी जोड़ों की हत्याएं कर दी जाती हैं। इन हत्याओं के पीछे परिवार, जाति पंचायत और कट्टरपंथी संगठनों का दबदबा बना रहा है।

ऑनर किलिंग के मामले में एक परिवार में पुरुषों की तुलना में महिलाओं के साथ अधिक अत्याचार किया जाता है, जो दर्शाता है कि कानून के समक्ष कोई समानता नहीं है। एक महिला की हत्या की जाती है जो लैंगिक उल्लंघन है। भारतीय संविधान के अनुच्छेद 19 और अनुच्छेद 21 क्रमशः स्वतंत्रता के अधिकार और जीवन के अधिकार से संबंधित हैं। ऑनर किलिंग के मामले में व्यक्ति के दोनों अधिकारों का उल्लंघन होता है। किसी व्यक्ति को अपना जीवन साथी चुनने का अधिकार है। किसी व्यक्ति को किसी की स्वतंत्रता और जीवन छीनने का अधिकार नहीं है। हिंदू विवाह अधिनियम, 1857 के अनुसार- प्रत्येक नागरिक धारा 3 में परिभाषित 18 वर्ष की आयु प्राप्त करने के बाद वयस्क हो जाएगा। यदि कोई व्यक्ति अपने परिवार द्वारा तय की गई शादी को स्वीकार नहीं कर रहा है, तो किसी को भी परिवार के अपमान के नाम पर उस व्यक्ति को मारने का कोई अधिकार नहीं है। किसी तरह से ऑनर किलिंग हत्या के समान ही है।

प्रेम प्रसंग से जुड़े मामलों को लेकर जिस तरह से हत्याएं हो रही हैं उससे दिमाग में कई सवाल उपजते हैं। क्या सम्मान के नाम पर होने वाली हत्याएं वास्तव में इतने बड़े पर होती हैं? उस वक्त उन माता-पिता की मनोस्थिति क्या होगी जब वो झूठी इज्जत के खातिर अपने ही बच्चों का कत्ल करने को तैयार हो जाते हैं? ऐसे मामलों के वक्त आखिर किस तरह से जाति पंचायतें, रिश्तेदार संबंधित परिवारों या लोगों की निजी जिंदगी को नियंत्रित करती है? प्रेमी युगलों की ओर से सुरक्षा की गुहार के बाद भी पुलिस, प्रशासन उन्हें बचाने का प्रयास क्यों नहीं करता? क्या यह मान लिया जाए कि पुलिस इस तरह की बर्बर हत्याओं को रोक नहीं सकती? सवाल उठता है कि जहां ऐसी वारदात होती है वहां के निर्वाचित जन प्रतिनिधियों की क्या जवाबदेही बनती है? बहरहाल, सर्वाधिक दुखद पहलू तो यह है कि हमारे देश की सरकारें भी ऐसी वारदातों को रोकने में नाकाम हो रही हैं। (लेखक भारत अपडेट के संपादक हैं)

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Witch-Hunting: Myths, Misconceptions and Misery

A Witch doctor creates witches

(Translated from Odia)

By *Sasmita Sahoo, The Sambad*

In today's age of Artificial Intelligence, can you imagine that a cot is delivering justice! Yet in a remote village in Odisha, justice is still decided by a *cot*. Again, based on this legal suspicion, twenty-one villagers convinced by superstition dragged two young men into the forest. Accused of practicing witchcraft, they were burned alive. Their screams vanished into the night.

And the horror did not end there. An innocent woman, Triveni Chand, was declared a witch simply because a cot “moved” during a ritual. She was stripped, tied to a pole, forced to drink filth-laden water, and beaten mercilessly.

In a world where machines can think, humans are still trapped in the chains of fear and superstition. Unbelievable as it may sound but this is reality.

Such incidents are happening frequently in our region. Like Triveni Chand, another victim is Reshma Behera from the Sindhekela area of Balangir district. On the 19th July 2024, ten doctors at Burla Vimsar performed a surgical procedure and removed 70 metal pins from Reshma's head. Yet the story did not end there. The next day, another 7 pins were removed. How did so many pins end up in Reshma's head? The answer given was '*witchcraft or tantric treatment*.' After her mother's death, as Reshma's health deteriorated, her family relied on a *guniyā* (witch doctor) instead of proper medical treatment. The *guniyā* allegedly implanted over 70 pins in Reshma's head. Such acts of tantric cruelty have left everyone in shock.

Pami Majhi from Betapani (Nuasahi) village in Mayurbhanj district is **around** 65 years old. With her long, untamed hair and a life devoted to prayers and rituals from dawn to dusk, she has become the center of suspicion in the village. Whenever someone falls ill, a fever strikes, crops fail or cows stop giving milk, all eyes turn to Pami. Her

appearance and mannerisms have made her look like a witch in the eyes of the villagers. Despite enduring many abuses, Pami continues to live her life quietly.

One day, Hetgej Pingua's son, Hindustani Pingua, fell severely ill with fever and persistent cough. Despite several attempts at conventional treatment, there was no improvement. In desperation, they approached a *guniyā* (witch doctor). The *guniyā* claimed that a witch had possessed Hindustani, describing in detail how the witch appeared and acted. From the descriptions, Hindustani realized that Pami Majhi was being accused of being the witch. Fearing for her life, Pami had to hide in the house of a relative far from the village.

Yet, Hindustani's condition worsened day by day. He began to cough up blood, his body grew weak, and his health deteriorated rapidly. To snatch the witch from his body, Hindustani murdered Pami Majhi by separated her head and body by two pieces. He also killed Pami's husband.

Witchcraft-Related Crimes in Odisha: Mayurbhanj Leads the List

Witchcraft and witch doctor-related incidents continue to plague Odisha, with Mayurbhanj district often at the center of such inhuman activities. One notable case occurred on December 18, 2014, highlighting the persistence of these atrocities over the past decade. Many of these incidents involve murders fueled by suspicion of witchcraft.

A joint survey conducted by the Odisha State Commission for Women and ActionAid revealed that 83% of witchcraft and witch doctor-related cases are concentrated in seven districts such as Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Rayagada, Malkangiri, Kendujhar, Gajapati, and Ganjam. Other districts, including Nabarangpur, Balasore, Nayagarh, Koraput, and Kandhamal, are not far behind. Among these, Mayurbhanj ranks first, followed by Kendujhar in second place, Sundargarh third, Ganjam fourth, Rayagada fifth, Malkangiri sixth, and Koraput seventh. Alarming, 67% of murders arising from witchcraft suspicion occur within these seven districts, underscoring the concentrated and ongoing nature of this social issue.

When an Ordinary Woman Becomes a ‘Witch’

In some tribal communities, a deep-rooted belief persists: *“Just as tigers and lions live in the forest, witches naturally exist in the village.”* According to this superstition, a woman can use secret knowledge or mantras to harm anyone she wishes. It is believed that learning just a few spells is enough to become a witch, but the true power of these rituals depends on **sacrifices** — her child, her siblings or even her husband.

This belief has given rise to a saying: *“A new witch eats children.”* In such a worldview, whenever a child dies, infant mortality occurs, a young person dies, or a husband passes away prematurely, villagers can easily accuse an innocent woman as a witch.

These superstitions are especially common in areas inhabited by Dalits and tribal communities, where poverty, malnutrition, disease and entrenched customs make people more vulnerable to fear. Tragically, accusations of witchcraft often escalate to murders and violent attacks, reflecting how superstition and social hardships combine to create a culture of fear and injustice.

How an Ordinary Woman is Falsely Labeled a Witch

In many villages, misfortune is often blamed on supernatural causes rather than practical solutions. When a family member falls ill, livestock die, theft occurs, unrest spreads, or a child or young adult dies, some villagers relied on a guniyā (witch doctor) instead of taking rational steps to address the problem.

The guniyā exploits their helplessness, manipulating people’s fears and emotions. Simply accusing someone of being a witch is not enough for them, the accusation must be proven. To do this, they employ various so-called witch-identification methods, which were often baseless and cruel.

These practices, deeply rooted in superstition, have been documented by Debendra Sutar a rationalist in his book, *“The Story of the Witch”*, highlighting how fear and manipulation lead to injustice against innocent women.

- **The Superstition of the ‘Nail Mirror (Nakh Darpan)’**

In some villages, the ritual *Nakh Darpan* (nail mirror) is used to identify witches or thieves. Children, adolescents or women from the family of the accused are involved. In reality, it is a form of hypnosis. The *guniyā* (witch doctor) applies substances like mustard oil and vermilion to the fingernail, chants mantras and instructs the participant to focus. Fear and belief cause the mind to “visualize” the accused, while reflections on the nail reinforce the illusion. Though rejected in educated societies, some villagers still trust this superstition, letting fear and manipulation control their actions.

- **KulaBula**

Whether I will get a job or not, whether my daughter will get married next year or not, whether Ramu has stolen my car or not, whether someone has killed my cow or not—how can one get answers to all these questions? One option is to approach the police. But even today, in some regions, people seek answers to such questions through a practice called “**Kula Bula.**” A practitioner called a *Guniya* performs this work for a fee. The practice of catching thieves, identifying witches (*Dahani*), and other matters through Kula Bula has been prevalent for a long time.

So, what is **Kula Bula**? A long scissors is inserted into the middle of the upper surface of a wooden plank called a *Kula*. Once the *Kula* is prepared to move, the *Guniya* recites a mantra. While chanting, the questioner places their middle finger on one handle of the scissors, and a person known to the questioner places their middle finger on the other handle. Then, the tantric instructs the questioner to silently repeat their question in their mind. If the answer is “yes” the *Kula* rotates. If the answer is “no” the *Kula* remains still.

- **Khata Bula (Cot moving)**

Khat Bula is a traditional practice used to catch thieves or identify witches (*Dahani*). It has been around for a long time, similar to *Nakh Darpan*. For this, a special rope cot called a

Daudiya Khata is used.

A tantric performs rituals and sometimes even offers their own blood to deities. Four people lift the *cot* on their shoulders. After a few minutes, the tantric declares that the weight of the *cot* has increased. Gradually, the *cot* starts moving, and the carriers begin running with it.

Wherever the *cot* stops, that person is identified as a witch or thief. In most cases, the villagers have already decided in advance who will be accused, and the tantric participates in this process along with the carriers.

- **Atagula (Dough Balls)**

Atagula is a traditional test used to identify witches (*Dahani*). Small dough balls are placed in water. Normally, dough sinks, but if a ball floats, the woman whose name is linked to it is considered a witch. A *Guniya* (practitioner) chants mantras while placing the dough balls in water, calling out the names of women from the village. If a ball floats, that woman is labeled a witch. In reality, the *Guniya* already knows from the villagers who is suspected. The dough balls of those women are secretly filled with light materials like thermocol, which makes them float.

- **Red Footprints on White Clothes**

This is a traditional method used to identify witches (*Dahani*). A white cloth is spread on the ground, and village women are asked to walk over it. The *Guniya* (practitioner) chants mantras and applies substances like soaked rice, leaves, grass and flowers to their feet, then pours water over them. After this, red marks appear on the cloth for one or two women. These women are labeled as witches. In reality, the tantric or villagers already decide in advance who will be accused. The red marks are caused by a chemical reaction between lime on the cloth and a special tamarind water applied to the chosen women's feet.

Expert's views and opinions on witch hunting

The Law Exists, but Cannot Be Enforced

*When villagers gather and accuse a woman of being a witch (Dahani), this mindset is referred to in psychology as “**mob psychology**.” Usually, widowed, lonely or marginalized women become the primary victims of such accusations. This harmful tradition still exists in many places. Since it is a collective crime, it often does not reach the police station. Even when it does, no effective action is taken. Although laws have been introduced since 2013 to address violence and exploitation related to witchcraft accusations, these regulations have not been fully implemented. As a result, the law remains largely ineffective. There is still a long way to go in government, individual, and social efforts to completely end the practices of witch-hunting and exploitation.*

—Ghasiram Panda, National Project Head, ActionAid NGO

Guniya Find Jobs and Raising Awareness

Superstitions about Guniya and witches (Dahani) are stronger in tribal villages than in cities. The main reason for these harmful practices is health problems. People need to understand that sickness in humans or animals is not caused by Guniya or witches. Villagers should be encouraged to go to doctors instead of relying on Guniya. Awareness messages can be shared by Anganwadi workers, school teachers, and panchayat members. The Odisha Witch Identification and Prevention Act (2013) exists to stop witch-hunting, but local police must enforce it. Providing alternative jobs to Guniya (Witch doctor) can also help reduce the problem.

—Devendra Sutar, Rationalist and Editor of Baigyanic charcha

Clearing People's Misconceptions

Even today, in many parts of the state, when people feel unwell, they rely on traditional remedies and home treatments instead of consulting a doctor. We need to understand why such “healthcare behaviors” are common among people. In addition, health workers need to explain the real causes behind mass deaths or the spread of diseases. Only then can we eliminate this alleged violence. Between 2014 and 2022, more than 600 cases related to witch-hunting were registered in the state. Therefore, there is a need to raise health awareness and correct people's misconceptions.

— **Shashiprabha Bindhani**, Former Information Commissioner



Sasmita Sahoo, a journalist with 10 years' experience, reports on human rights, development, and gender issues. A Senior Reporter at The Sambad, her award-winning work amplifies marginalized voices across Odisha.

How a Guwahati DJ Was Held Captive by Her Family to Stop Her Marriage to a Muslim Man

By **Rokibuz Zaman**, *scroll.in*

The disappearance and rescue – after three months – of popular DJ Damini Bhajanka has left many questions about the role of the Assam police.

On the night of December 13, a day before she was supposed to fly down to Mumbai to get married to a Kashmiri Muslim man, Damini Bhajanka went missing from Guwahati.

A popular disc jockey who lives and works in Mumbai, her social media feed went silent, her phones were switched off.

For three months, her partner Waseem Raja Mughal searched for the 27-year-old woman. He filed a police complaint about her disappearance in Guwahati. He wrote to the National Commission of Women and filed a habeas corpus petition at the Gauhati High Court. “I went to everybody, from the police to the media for three months,” he told *Scroll*. “But nobody listened to me. They accused me of lying or of being mad.”

Bhajanka was finally rescued from a resort in Shillong on March 12, when she gave a written statement to the Meghalaya police, accusing her family members of kidnapping her and confining her against her wishes in a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts and alcoholics. “They did all these to stop my marriage with a Muslim man,” Bhajanka told *Scroll*.

The alleged abduction of an adult woman by her family, and confinement for three months to stop an inter-faith marriage – without the police taking any action – has raised eyebrows in Assam and elsewhere.

On March 15, Bhajanka filed a complaint at Mumbai’s Versova police station, asking for a zero FIR to be filed against her mother, brother, maternal uncle, cousin and his girlfriend. A zero FIR can be filed at any police station, irrespective of the place where the alleged crime took place. The police station that registers the zero FIR has to forward it to the station that has jurisdiction over the matter.

More than two weeks after her rescue, no first information report has been filed by the police in three states – Assam, from where she went missing; Maharashtra, where she lived; and Meghalaya, from where she was rescued.

The day she went missing

Three days before Bhajanka, who goes by the name of DJ Dionne, was meant to get married at a marriage registration office in Mumbai, her mother Rekha Bhajanka called her home urgently.

She said she needed her daughter to sign “some important papers” related to a court case involving family property.

Bhajanka reluctantly agreed to travel to Guwahati on December 13, but booked a return flight for the next day. She said her mother knew that she had been in a six-year live-in relationship with Mughal and had agreed to attend the wedding.

She landed in the Assam capital at 12.13 am and sent her fiancé a message – the last time Mughal was to hear from her until she was rescued.

Bhajanka was picked up from the airport by her 25-year-old brother, Nishant Agarwal, and her cousin Gaurav Agarwal. They told her that they were going to the advocate’s office to sign the documents.

After a 40-minute drive, she realised that she had been brought to a rehabilitation centre in the middle of the city. Her phone and other belongings were confiscated.

A group of young women dragged her out of the car, as she shouted for help. “My cousin and brother threatened to beat me to death if I resisted,” Bhajanka told *Scroll*.

Bhajanka denied that she had any history of drug addiction or medical reports that said she was addicted to any substance. “I kept asking why I had been brought here,” she said. “They told me that my mother had given them permission to keep me there. I cried the entire night.”

She did not meet her mother for another two months, Bhajanka said.

The co-founder of the rehab centre, Bornali Baishya, refused to speak about Bhajanka’s allegations, citing patient anonymity. “We admit people with the consent of the guardian,” she told *Scroll*.

Habeas corpus petition

Thirteen days after her disappearance, Mughal decided to file an e-complaint with the Dispur police from Mumbai.

Any citizen can file such a complaint on a designated website. After verification by the concerned police station, the complaint is converted to an FIR.

In his complaint on December 26, a copy of which *Scroll* has seen, Mughal alleged that he had had no news from Bhajanka for two weeks.

“She was supposed to [perform at a venue] in Hyderabad on December 31, but her brother has returned the Rs 50,000 advance money yesterday on Damini’s behalf, and he is not giving any information about Damini to the organisers or anyone,” the complaint said.

Mughal told *Scroll* that when he called officials at Dispur police station, they promised to help him – but took no action. “Then the sub-inspector and officer-in-charge blocked my calls and WhatsApp messages,” he said.

Asked about Mughal’s complaint, a police official at Dispur police station told *Scroll*, “It is a family issue and that’s why we did not give it much importance.”

He said that “there was a love affair between the complainant and the girl, Damini. But it seems the girl’s family did not agree to their relationship.”

On January 3, Mughal filed a complaint with the National Commission of Women. On January 19, he filed a habeas corpus petition before the Gauhati High court, and declared Bhajanka’s mother Rekha Bhajanka, brother Nishant Agarwal, the director-general of police in Assam, the National Commission of Women and the officer-in-charge of Dispur Police as respondents.

In the high court, the matter was listed for hearing three times, but Mughal’s advocate sought adjournment for health reasons and then to file additional documents. The last hearing was on March 4.

Days in the rehab

While Mughal was trying to coax the police to take action, Bhajanka was in distress at the rehabilitation centre.

“I was surrounded by drug addicts, alcoholics and criminals,” she told *Scroll*. “I would stay up all night afraid that any of them could come and hurt me physically.”

For over six weeks, she was not allowed to meet anyone from her family. After 40-odd days, her maternal uncle visited her. She said she pleaded with him to take her home. “He refused,” she said, “He replied with pride that they saved me from getting married to a Muslim man.”

By then, Bhajanka said she was a physical and mental wreck. “It was like spending time in a jail,” she said. “I was made to mop the floor three times a day, wash utensils, and clean the common toilet. I had suicidal thoughts, and once tried to cut my wrists.”

Finally, after two months, her mother and brother visited the centre.

“I held my mother tightly and cried a lot and pleaded and begged to take me out,” she said. “They told me that marrying Waseem would destroy my life and our family reputation. They left me there, crying.”

By March, news of her disappearance had begun to spread, and Mughal’s persistence had led to some coverage of her disappearance on social media and local news channels.

On March 11, she was asked to pack her belongings at the centre. Her mother Rekha, brother Nishant and cousin Gaurav picked her from the rehab centre. “But they did not take me home,” Bhajanka said.

They told her that Mughal had “trapped them in a huge conspiracy” and accused them of abducting her.

The next day, she was taken to a resort called Midhill Cottage in Shillong.

Her mother and brother asked her to make a video saying that she had been living happily with her family for the last three months. That, they said, would “save them from going to jail”.

Bhajanka sensed an opportunity. “They gave me my mother’s phone and quietly left,” she said. “I locked the room inside and I called my

fiancé around 9.45 pm. I sent him a video asking to rescue me from my mother, brother and maternal uncle and cousin.”

Mughal alerted the Meghalaya police, who arrived at the cottage around 11.30 pm and rescued her around midnight.

The Meghalaya police officials treated her kindly, Bhajanka said. “But I was shocked that they let my brother and mother go, despite my written statement saying that they had abducted me,” she said.

Later, they dropped her at a friend’s home in Shillong. The next day, she took a flight to Mumbai.

Scroll sent queries to senior Meghalaya police officials. The story will be updated if they respond.

‘Do family members kidnap anyone?’

The disappearance and rescue of Bhajanka has left many questions about the role of the Assam police.

Bhajanka said that she called Assam police officials after her rescue, asking them to file an FIR against her family. “But they ignored me completely and disconnected the call,” she said.

However, Guwahati commissioner of police Diganta Barah dismissed the charges as “a family issue”. “A drug addict daughter has been kept in a rehab centre by her family members without informing others. Is that a crime?” he asked *Scroll*. “She is still not out of drug addiction and keeps uploading videos, saying that her family members kidnapped her. Do family members ever kidnap anyone?”

However, several women activists and advocates contested the police version.

“Prima facie, this case is not related to drug addiction,” said a woman activist, who does not want to be identified. “She was put into a rehab centre because of the disagreement over her marriage.”

Another activist pointed out that it is illegal “to restrain or abduct an adult woman and put her in a rehab against her will without a medical history.”

“Medical practitioners have to authorise that a person is a drug addict or the person had a history of addiction before putting someone into rehab,” the activist added. “In this particular case, the circumstances in which she was sent to rehab raise questions and doubts.”

Bhajanka and Waseem got married on March 21 in Mumbai. “We will pursue the case till an FIR is registered and we get justice for the trauma and harassment they have caused us,” Bhajanka said.



Rokibuz Zaman, an award-winning journalist with Scroll.in since 2021, reports on politics, human rights, and conflict in Northeast India. His honors include the RedInk, *Laadli*, and Vishwa Nath Awards.

<https://scroll.in/article/1065778/how-a-guwahati-dj-was-held-captive-by-her-family-to-stop-her-marriage-to-a-muslim-man>

Hostage in Hathras: 4 years later, Dalit victim's family still awaits relocation and justice

By **Nidhi Suresh**, *Newslaundry.com*



In a corner of the wardrobe, a mud pot has been pushed to the back. In it are Asha's ashes, hidden behind her clothes and dried nail polish bottles.

"We don't intend to conduct her last rites until we get justice," said her mother.

It has been four years since the Hathras gang-rape and murder case. In September 2020, Asha, a 19-year-old Dalit girl, was found half-naked, bleeding and barely alive just metres from her house. She died two weeks later in hospital. Her body was forcibly cremated by the Uttar Pradesh police.

Four years after Asha's death, three of the accused are back to the village and living as neighbours to her family. Meanwhile, her own family continues to live a life of "captivity", caged inside their own home.

In July 2024, Asha's family informed the Allahabad High Court that even though they were supposed to be relocated and given a job, neither of it had happened. They also told the court that the security arrangements were making it difficult for them to move around. The court has sought a response from the Uttar Pradesh government.

In the beginning of July, four years after the crime, *NewsLaundry* visited Asha's home.

A goat and a CRPF personnel shared a cooler outside their house. Inside a makeshift bunker, four personnel were lying down. Fifty metres away, in another bunker, five CRPF men were lazing while a buffalo stood chewing its cud next to them.

Another group of personnel stood with their guns around the house. Some scrolled on their phones, and some dozed off.

Eight CCTV cameras peered down at the family at all hours. Anyone entering or exiting the house had to enter their details into a registry maintained by the CRPF.

"There's at least 20-25 men standing guard at all times. A few stand outside, some behind the house and one on the roof," said Asha's father as we stepped through a metal detector and walked into the house.

In her dying declaration, Asha had alleged that she was gangraped. She named four Thakur men as her rapists: Sandeep, 22, Ravi, 30, Ramu, 29, and Luvkush, 21. Three months later, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) claimed to have found enough evidence to charge the four accused men of gang-rape and murder.

However, in March 2023, two years after the trial commenced, the Hathras district court acquitted Ravi, Ramu, and Luvkush. Sandeep was sentenced to life for culpable homicide not amounting to murder. No rape charges were included in the conviction.

The trial court set aside Asha's dying declaration and said that if the rape had happened, the victim, when she spoke to the media, would have told the reporters about it as well. It also said the medical examination had not been able to establish rape. The prosecution contended that the medical examination had happened only after 10 days and Asha had spoken about the rape to officials as well as media persons.

Within three months of the verdict, Asha's family challenged the judgement at the Allahabad High Court. Sandeep, who is serving life, also sought a review. The Uttar Pradesh government, who is conducting the criminal prosecution of the case, however, has not yet filed an appeal.

The CBI which had found all four men guilty of gangrape and murder should have filed an appeal. Anurag Modi, the CBI's senior public prosecutor, who represented the CBI at the Hathras trial court, told *Newslandry* that he is "not authorised" to respond to our questions. "It was most definitely a disappointing verdict. When you have chargesheeted four men for gangrape and murder and presented all evidence, it was disappointing," he said.

A year later, the high court is yet to announce an admission date for hearing both appeals.

On September 30, 2020, just a few hours after Asha was cremated against the wishes of her family, her father couldn't hold himself together. Between giving media interviews, he would walk to a corner of the courtyard and throw up, with one hand on the wall and one on his stomach.

This happened multiple times.

Amidst this, the police arrived and whisked him away to the police station. Inside, a video call had been set up. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath consoled Asha's father and promised him a house and a government job. The same was reiterated in an official letter.

But four years on, those promises have not been kept.

Asha's family filed more than four affidavits at the Allahabad High Court requesting for a house and job, before the court directed for the same in July 2022.

In 2021, the UP government said a new house could be given if the family gave up their current home and land in Hathras. When they refused, the state offered to relocate the family within Hathras. For the family, this defeated the purpose.

The state government then told the court that the promises by Yogi Adityanath were not enforceable by law and "not mandatory". The

government also claimed there was no need to give the family a government job since they were not financially dependent on Asha.

However, in July 2022, the high court directed the UP government to consider giving a job and house to the family, given the social and economic rehabilitation as well as the educational requirements of Asha's three young nieces. Judge Ranjan Roy noted that the family had a clear legal basis for the demand. The UP government was given six months to decide and find an area of relocation which was socially conducive to the family.

"It is not too much for the family to ask for relocation outside Hathras in the circumstances in which they find themselves wherein their movements are highly restricted on account of their security by the CRPF and also on account of the alleged hostile behaviour/attitude of the other villagers who belong to the upper caste," the court had said.

It has been over two years since that order, and nothing has changed. "This isn't just contempt of court, it is a crime," said advocate Mehmood Pracha, who now represents the family in court. Chapter II, section 4 of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, titled 'punishment of neglect for duties', states that any public servant who "willfully neglects his duties required to be performed by him" shall be punishable with imprisonment for six months to a year.

"The courts too have become a mere shock absorber for the state. When there was public outrage, they gave strong orders. When the public interest fades, the court also takes no real action," said Pracha.

Unanswered letters

In July 2024, Asha's father wrote personal letters to the Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, President Droupadi Murmu, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi.

Asha's father wrote that despite being the victims, they had been serving "prison-like sentences for four years" due to the security arrangements.

He said that all three of Asha's nieces were unable to go to school and that "no member of the family" was employed. "The financial and mental condition of my family is very bad."

He added that the compensation provided by the government would eventually get depleted, and without a job, that laid out a scary future.

In the letter to the Chief Justice of India, Asha's father indicated a faltering hope. "Is there justice for Dalit people or not?"

In his letter to CM Adityanath, Asha's father reminded him of his promises and said, "Till today, your Uttar Pradesh government has not followed the order of the honourable high court. Till today my family and I still do not know whose body the administration burnt."

He is yet to receive a response.

Why does the relocation matter?

Why is Asha's family filing repeated requests with the court asking for a house and a job?

To truly comprehend the depth of these affidavits requires an understanding of the family's social location, lived reality, and caste politics.

Asha is survived by her parents, two brothers, a sister, grandmother, and three nieces.

The area in which Asha's family lives is dominated by Thakurs and Brahmins. Of the nearly 600 families, nearly half are Thakur and a hundred are Brahmin. Only about 15 families are Dalit. Within that, in Asha's own village, which has about 50 houses, there used to be only four Valmiki families. The village is physically divided along caste lines.

In 2022, two years after Asha's death, two Valmiki families moved out of the village. Currently there are only two Dalit families, including Asha's, in the village.

Caste fault lines run deep in the village. "Whenever there is a function, the Valmiki community members are invited too, but only to clean up," a villager from the Thakur community had told *Newslaundry*, back in 2021.

A person from the Valmiki community told this reporter how, even now, when they went to a shop in the area, the shopkeeper sprinkled water on the money they handed over. “If by mistake one of us touches a packet of biscuits, we have to buy it and cannot return it,” said the victim’s brother.

“Since we are Dalits, the Thakurs in the village are very angry with us for filing a case against their community men,” Asha’s family told *NewsLaundry* on multiple occasions. The family has already faced threats from dominant caste members.

Back in 2020, after Asha’s death, her family had approached the Supreme Court seeking security. That’s when they were granted CRPF protection under the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018.

Since then, close to 30 CRPF personnel were assigned to guard the family. While this assured safety, it also meant a complete suspension of their normal life.

Asha’s lawyer said that since the district court’s verdict in 2023, the UP government has tried to argue that the family does not need protection anymore and that the CRPF should return. “But now, with three of the accused living next to them and without relocation, the family is in more need of security than before,” said advocate Pracha.

Over the course of the years, this protection has turned into a double-edged sword for the family. Even now, every time anyone from the family wanted to step out, they had to file an application with the CRPF in-charge seeking permission.

For example, if they needed to go to the market to buy medicines, they would have to file an application 24 hours in advance. If the request was accepted, the CRPF men would take the family in their truck. “The truck will stop at the market, four to five CRPF personnel will hop out, follow us to the medical shop and back to the truck,” said Asha’s father.

He had resumed working on the field behind their house one year ago, and when he left home at 7.30 am, he was always flanked by five CRPF men. “The security personnel surround the field while I work for about four hours. We don’t speak to anyone in the village and no one speaks to us,” he said.

Naveen, Asha's younger brother, could not recall the last time he or his father were able to attend a relative's wedding, funeral, or birthday celebrations.

Asha's mother wanted Naveen to get married. It would be nice to have a companion, Naveen said. "But how can I expect any woman to accept this kind of an imprisoned life with me?"

"We are just sitting here, being watched and forgotten at the same time," said his father.

"Everything has become strange and slow. Sometimes we step out and realise that the world around us is changing. But we're in this limbo, just hanging here, not moving anywhere," said Naveen.

This is why the family is seeking relocation — to feel safe and resume some sense of normalcy.

Protection has impacted their work.

Prior to Asha's death, her father and two brothers used to go to work. Naveen worked as a lab assistant in Ghaziabad, while Nitish, her elder brother, worked in a mobile company in Noida. Her father was a cleaner at a pharmacy near their house. In 2022, the UP government told the high court that Asha's father and brothers "voluntarily stopped" working; they did not lose their jobs. However, the reality wasn't that simple. When Asha was allegedly murdered and the family decided to fight for justice, all of them had to give up their jobs. The CRPF protection made it cumbersome for any of them to step out of their homes.

They have repeatedly told the court that they would prefer to move to Noida or Ghaziabad. They had relatives in both these places, and this way, they could resume working as well.

A job is not merely a job

Prior to Asha's death, her father and two brothers used to go to work.

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For Naveen, his job in Ghaziabad meant much more than a mere profession.

His only identity in his village is that of being Dalit. The city offered him a sense of much needed anonymity. "No one knew me there. I lived like everyone else. I drank water, walked, and moved around the city just like everyone else. That is not a freedom I have here," he said. "Now that I am back in my village, I have been pulled back into living this casteist life again."

Asha's father said that in the village, "even cats and dogs have more respect than us Valmiki's".

In the July 2022 high court order, the bench had observed that "clearly the family is in need of employment and that is why the same was promised by the head of the state. The promise is not based on any whims or fancy, but it is referable to statutory provisions and the rules made thereunder."

Choosing between justice and education

Nitish's three young girls — Asha's nieces Aditi, 8, Anita, 6, and Tanya, 4 — are now growing up in the backdrop of this crime.

Anita's most prized possession is a red-coloured school bag. In it is a pencil, a few ruled notebooks, and some colour pencils. As soon as this reporter reached her home, Anita stepped out into the courtyard wearing her school bag; she removed it, carefully took out her notebooks, and began to write the English alphabet.

"Naveen *bhaiya* (brother) taught me ABCD," she said. "When I go to school, I will carry this bag."

Tanya, the youngest one, grabbed her phone to show a video of her dancing to a Bollywood song.

Despite being old enough to go to school, Anita and Tanya spent all their time at home.

“We would like them to study in our village itself, but when we talked to the school authorities, they told us to send them at our own risk,” said Naveen, who spent his time teaching them whatever he could.

Like the village at large, the local school was also dominated by Thakur and Brahmin community students. “What if children from their community attack our children in school?” asked Naveen.

When *Newslandry* had visited Hathras a year ago, this tension was palpable among children in the village — the Thakurs and Brahmins did not play with the Dalits.

Dalit minors told this reporter that they faced constant threats from the Thakur boys. “They tell us that as soon as the CRPF men are gone, they will kill us.”

Asha’s friend Sneha, had broken her silence in September 2021 to narrate in chilling detail how she was harassed by the same men. While she hoped that Asha’s family would get relocated, she told *Newslandry* that she feared for the safety of her own family if the CRPF left. “We will become the target,” she said, explaining that the Thakurs were angry with the entire Dalit community for standing up against the four upper caste men. “And we don’t have the money, or any courtroom to go to. Who will protect us? For us, the CRPF men have been a blessing.”

The caste fissures also meant that Anita and Tanya could not play outside. They could not interact with any children in the village. They have learnt to play within their courtyard, sometimes with the other family members, sometimes with the CRPF personnel, and other times with the animals.

Naveen said that if the girls go to school in the same village, they would have to be accompanied by the security personnel, which was a “strange thing to do”.

Unlike Anita and Tanya, Aditi, the oldest of the girls, no longer lives in Hathras.

In September 2020, when Asha was attacked, Aditi was playing outside. “She heard us scream, she saw Asha naked, bleeding and strangulated when we brought her inside,” Nitish had told *Newslandry* back then. “It scared her. Sometimes, she wakes up and cries at night. She has been robbed of her innocence in every way.”

Months after the incident, Aditi was sent away to her grandmother’s house in a different village. The family wanted her to continue going to school and away from the trauma.

Asked why Anita and Tanya also cannot go to their grandparent’s village to study, Asha’s father explained, “They cannot look after three of our children, they could only take in one. So we chose to send one child.”

Aditi only came back home for a month once a year. “It’s not easy for any of us to be separated from her,” said Naveen.

The family wanted all of the girls to get an education, but the process of seeking justice has ensured that two of Asha’s nieces had to give up on their dreams of going to school or making friends.

Unsustainable journey to justice

The family informed the Allahabad High Court in July that the CRPF, who used to provide them transportation within Hathras, was asking the family to find their own means of travelling while still being accompanied by security personnel. The family told the court that the new rule imposed a significant financial and logistical burden on the family.

On July 11, when the court heard the family’s petition, the bench of justice Ranjan Roy and justice Jaspreet Singh said that until they thoroughly considered the issue, the family’s transportation should continue as before, that is via the CRPF vehicle.

The CRPF personnel have been assigned to provide transport to Asha’s family only within Hathras. This meant that everytime they travelled to Allahabad or Lucknow for a court hearing, they had to spend at least Rs 15,000.

“We’ve to hire a vehicle which can accommodate a driver, us and four-five CRPF personnel. We also have to pay for the driver’s food,” said Naveen.

This, Asha's father explained, was unsustainable, especially since the family didn't have any income. "It makes us think twice before going to court," he said.

As per Chapter IV-A, titled 'Rights of Victims and Witnesses', of the SC and ST (PoA) Act, it is the duty of the state "to arrange food or water or clothing or shelter or medical aid or transport facilities..." for victims and witnesses who are "accessing justice".

In July 2022, the high court had directed the Hathras District Magistrate to provide "transport facilities or reimbursement of full payment" to Asha's family.

"Till now, they have not received any support or reimbursement for their travel," said advocate Mehmood Pracha.

A series of betrayals

For the first three years, advocate Seema Kushwaha, who also fought the December 2012 Delhi gangrape case, had represented Asha's family. The family said that after the verdict in March 2023, she stopped communicating with the family.

"We kept trying to call her, but she just refused to speak to us properly after the verdict," said Naveen.

Seema Kushwaha told *NewsLaundry* that she is still in touch with the family. "I could not continue due to health reasons but I truly hope that the family gets the justice they deserve."

In March 2024, Seema Kushwaha joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "We felt betrayed by her decision," said Asha's brother.

Asha's forcible cremation was conducted during the BJP government's tenure.

"My decision to join BJP is a personal one and the family need not be concerned about it. I will still fight for women's rights," she said.

Eventually, the family hired Delhi-based senior advocate Mehmood Pracha to represent their case at the Allahabad High Court.

This was not the only "betrayal" the family has endured.

Back in 2020, the Allahabad High Court which took suo-motu cognisance of the forcible cremation had criticised the officials for infringing on Asha and her family's human rights.

"Would you have burnt the body if the victim was from a well-to-do family," the bench had asked District Magistrate Praveen Kumar Laxkar.

Laxkar, who had overseen the cremation, was caught on camera openly threatening the family and asking them not to speak to the media.

The high court bench had also asked a senior officer of the UP police, the then ADG (law and order) Prashant Kumar, if he would have allowed his daughter to be cremated the same way.

Back then, Vikrant Vir, the superintendent of police who oversaw the cremation, was suspended. But today, he is the superintendent of Ballia district, about 150 km away from Hathras.

Praveen Kumar Laxkar, who was also suspended, is currently the Ballia DM.

In response to the outrage over Asha's forcible cremation, in September 2022, the UP government proposed a new guideline for such cremations to ensure the maintenance of "law and order".

However, Prashant Kumar, now the DGP (law and order) in Uttar Pradesh, said that the cremation guideline was a broad executive direction given to the police.

In a rape case, the most crucial evidence is the body of the victim. Given the questions around the investigation and police medical procedure, Asha's family had wanted a second postmortem. But before they could process her death and seek the second postmortem, the body was eliminated.

Besides, even though the court took a strong stand on how authorities forcibly cremated and "destroyed evidence," with time, "the officials have simply been reprimanded and let off," said advocate Pracha.

"Why was an FIR not filed against those officials? I keep asking the UP police officials if an FIR was filed against those who conducted the forced cremation, and they won't tell me. Without an FIR, they will not

be investigated,” he said, adding that he intended to raise this in court. According to him, the state played an active role in the destruction of evidence. “The provisions of the SC/ST act have not been followed. There’s enough reason for a mistrial here.”

Newslandry reached out to the UP government’s counsel SV Raju and the CM’s office for comment. This report will be updated if a response is received.

‘Justice is not a simple goal’

According to the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2022 report, Dalits continue to be the most vulnerable to caste-based violence.

The data revealed a 13.1 per cent increase in caste atrocities from 2021. The crime rate, which was 25.3 per cent, had risen to 28.6 per cent in 2022.

A report by the Citizens of Justice and Peace cited the NCRB data to estimate a 45 per cent surge in sexual violence cases against Dalit women between 2015 and 2020. Rape against Dalit women and girls happened at an alarming average of 10 incidents per day.

Despite the numbers, research has often highlighted that due to the oppressive social hierarchies, many cases of violence against Dalit women go unreported.

When Asha died, the nation roared. For a country living in the shadows of the December 2012 Delhi gangrape and murder, the anger was not new. And Asha’s family was hailed for being brave and fighting for her, despite living in a Thakur-dominated village.

However, after four years, falling off the news cycle and multiple court visits, the entire family has introspected on what justice even meant.

This reporter asked them if this was how they imagined their road to justice to feel like.

“No, never. We never thought this would be our reality. Aren’t we victims in this case?” asked Naveen. “If we had known this from the beginning...” he started, but immediately stopped himself from completing the sentence.

He began again.

“There are so many rapes happening to Dalit women everyday. And everyone keeps saying we should speak up and file complaints. In our case, we had media attention. But if another poor Dalit family asks me if they should fight for justice or not, I don’t know if I would immediately say yes. I would want them to know what the process is,” he said.

Time has forced Asha’s father to introspect everything. “It’s not what you imagine. If you fight, it’s a problem. If you don’t fight, it’s a problem.”

Now, the media visits them only during election time. “They come, thrust their mics under us, ask how it feels and leave. After that they forget we’re still alive, we’re still here,” he said. “We’ve now come to understand, justice is not a simple goal to have.”

**The names of the victim and everyone in her family have been changed to protect identity.*

Kush Bhautik Vaidya contributed to research.



Nidhi Suresh, an independent journalist based in New Delhi, reports on sexual violence, caste, and politics. Her award-winning work has appeared in major global outlets and earned international recognition.

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2024/08/19/hostage-in-hathras-4-years-later-dalit-victims-family-still-awaits-relocation-and-justice>

UN heard,
written,
told...

III.

Body, Health & Autonomy

Focusing on bodily integrity, reproductive rights, and the gendered dimensions of healthcare.

The body has always been a battleground — for control, for care, for choice. For women and marginalised genders, it is where questions of autonomy, health, and dignity collide most fiercely. This section examines how our healthcare systems, social attitudes, and silences shape the experience of inhabiting one's body — and the ongoing struggle to claim agency over it. From the biases that determine who receives care and how, to the quiet endurance of those denied it, these stories reveal how deeply gender still governs our most intimate realities.

Through explorations of reproductive rights, sexuality, and menstrual equity, these narratives demand a more humane and inclusive vision of health. Whether confronting medical neglect, the unequal burden of contraception, or the enduring shame around menstruation, each story insists that health is not merely the absence of illness — it is the presence of respect, awareness, and the freedom to decide what happens to one's own body.

My Body, My Rights: Advocating for gender-sensitive medicine and reproductive justice.

1. **Anurag Kumar Srivastava** - नसबंदी -- महिलाएं ही क्यों जिम्मेदार?
2. **Suman Parmar** - प्रसव और गरिमा: स्वास्थ्य के नाम पर गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ हिंसा

Dignity and Discharge:

Reporting on menstrual equity and hygiene.

1. **Nikku Kumari** - मेरा पहला पीरियड आने से पहले मेरी शादी हो चुकी थी और मुझे कुछ नहीं पता था
2. **Kavita Swami** - वो 5 दिन... पीरियड्स के दिनों में एक ही पैड में चौराहे पर खड़े रह कर 10 घंटे ड्यूटी की, महिलाओं के लिए वहां वॉशरूम तक नहीं

नसबंदी -- महिलाएं ही क्यों जिम्मेदार?

By *Anurag Kumar Srivastava, Yatharthwadi*

भारत में परिवार नियोजन की जिम्मेदारी सिर्फ महिलाओं की ही क्यों है ? पुरुष नसबंदी से क्यों घबराते हैं ? उत्तर प्रदेश में भी महिला और पुरुष नसबंदी के बीच का यह अंतर साफ नजर आता है। सरकार द्वारा नसबंदी करने के लिए व्यापक प्रचार-प्रसार भी किया जाता है, लेकिन नसबंदी के लिए पुरुष सामने नहीं आते सिर्फ महिलाओं को आगे लाकर उनकी नसबंदी करा दिया जाता है जो कि महिलाओं के लिए ठीक नहीं है। जनसंख्या के नियंत्रण के लिए सबसे जरूरी सामाजिक स्तर पर सोच में बदलाव लाना है। परिवारों में आज भी बच्चों के नियंत्रण का दबाव महिलाओं पर होता है। जबकि पुरुष अपने पुरुषार्थ के दंभ में इस पर विचार नहीं करते हैं। यदि विचार करते भी हैं तो नसबंदी के विकल्प को स्वीकार नहीं करते। क्योंकि नसबंदी उनकी समाज निर्मित मानसिक संरचना में पुरुषार्थ पर प्रश्न चिह्न अंकित कर देती है। हालांकि विकल्प के तौर पर गर्भ निरोध गोलियां भी मौजूद हैं लेकिन ये गोलियां किसी न किसी तौर पर महिलाओं के स्वास्थ्य पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव डालती हैं। ये ही वजह है कि महिलाएं इन दवाओं की जगह नसबंदी के विकल्प को अपनाती हैं। आबादी बढ़ाने के लिए सिर्फ महिलाएं ही जिम्मेदार हैं कब तक महिलाओं को आगे करके उन पर अत्याचार किया जायेगा इस बारे में सरकार को सोचना चाहिए और कड़े कदम उठाना चाहिए। महिला और पुरुष की संख्या हमेशा बराबर की होनी चाहिए तभी समाज में अच्छा संदेश जायेगा। नसबंदी प्रक्रिया में महिलाओं की संख्या पुरुष की संख्या में आधे से भी अधिक है। केवल महिलाओं को आधी आबादी माना गया है लेकिन उनको हर जगह पुरुष की अपेक्षा कम सम्मान दिया जाता है।

पुरुषों में मर्दानगी खोने का डर हावी विश्व में जनसंख्या के स्तर पर भारत दूसरा बड़ा देश है। अगर जनसंख्या ऐसे ही बढ़ती रही तो आने वाले समय में भारत, चीन को भी पीछे छोड़कर नंबर वन की भूमिका में आ जाएगा। इसका कारण जनसंख्या विस्फोट और जनसंख्या को नियंत्रित करने वाला कोई पैमाना नहीं होना है। जनसंख्या का तेजी से बढ़ना भारत को सामाजिक, आर्थिक दोनों ही क्षेत्रों में पीछे कर रहा है। जनसंख्या के बढ़ते दबाव से हमारे सीमित प्राकृतिक संसाधनों का तेजी से दोहन हो रहा है, बेरोजगारी का स्तर भी उसी तेजी से बढ़ रहा है। बढ़ते जनसंख्या की वजह से सामाजिकता खत्म हो रही है और शहरों में एकल प्रवृत्ति तेजी से बढ़ रही है। अगर कोई ठोस कदम नहीं उठाया गया तो यह जनसंख्या विस्फोट भारत के लिए हर दृष्टि से खतरनाक साबित होगा।

पुरुषों को नसबंदी के लिए प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए हर साल नवंबर में नसबंदी पखवाड़ा भी मनाया जाता है। इस दौरान पुरुषों को जानकारी दी जाती है कि नसबंदी करवाने से पुरुषों में

कामेच्छा, पौरुष, यौन सुख आदि में किसी तरह की कमी नहीं आएगी। इसके बाद भी पुरुष नसबंदी के लिए कम ही आगे आते हैं। दिलचस्प बात ये है कि नसबंदी के लिए सरकार की ओर से पुरुषों को महिलाओं के मुकाबले ज्यादा पैसा दिया जाता है फिर भी पुरुष नसबंदी शिविरों में बढ़-चढ़कर भाग नहीं लेते।

पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने के पीछे दो मुख्य कारण हैं। पहला यह कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पुरुष हेल्थ वर्कर की कमी है। गांव में आशा और एनएम महिलाएं हैं, जिनका पूरा ध्यान महिलाओं और बच्चों पर है। ऐसे में पुरुषों की जागरूकता का काम प्रभावित होता है। दूसरा कारण है कि पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने पर किसी भी अधिकारी की जवाबदेही तय नहीं होती। संविधान में लिखा है कि पुरुष और महिला में भेद नहीं है, लेकिन जहां भेद हो रहा उसे दूर करने के उपाय भी नहीं सोचे जा रहे। महिलाओं के अनुपात में पुरुषों की कम नसबंदी पर स्वास्थ्य विशेषज्ञ डाक्टर पी०के० चौधरी ने भी चिंता जाहिर करते हुए कहा है कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पुरुषों को नसबंदी के लिए प्रेरित करने का काम ठीक से नहीं हो रहा। साथ ही नसबंदी को लेकर स्वास्थ्य विभाग जो टारगेट निर्धारित करता है उसमें भी अलग से पुरुष नसबंदी पर ध्यान नहीं दिया जाता।

महिलाएं ढो रहीं परिवार नियोजन की जबाबदेही का भार विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार दुनिया भर में 10 करोड़ से ज्यादा महिलाएं गर्भ निरोधक गोलियों का इस्तेमाल करती हैं। 1960 के दशक में गर्भनिरोधक गोलियों की शुरुआत के बाद से ही इसके इस्तेमाल से अलग-अलग तरह के साइड इफेक्ट्स देखने को मिले हैं। डॉ० वीके वर्मा कहते हैं कि गर्भनिरोधक गोलियों के इस्तेमाल से प्रति दस हजार में से पांच से बारह महिलाओं में खून का थक्का जमने की शिकायत सामने आती है। और इनमें से कुछ महिलाओं की मौत होती है। इसका मतलब यह कतई नहीं है कि गर्भनिरोधक गोलियां महिलाओं के लिए असुरक्षित हैं। 2010-11 में भारत में करीब 95 फीसदी महिलाओं ने नसबंदी को अपनाया। जबकि पुरुषों में यह दर काफी कम रही। यह विचारणीय है कि क्यों महिलाओं की अपेक्षा पुरुष नसबंदी से भागते हैं। यहां तक कि अस्थायी रूप से गर्भधारण को रोकने के लिए अपनी सेक्स लाइफ में कॉन्डोम तक का इस्तेमाल करने से परहेज करते हैं। जबकि यह दोनों ही साधन स्त्री और पुरुष दोनों के स्वास्थ्य और सुरक्षा का आधार है। इस संबंध में पुरुषों के समाज मनोविज्ञान को समझने की आवश्यकता है। यह भी समझने की जरूरत है कि परिवार और स्वास्थ्य के प्रति जिम्मेदारियों से सजग, समाज का यह वर्ग नसबंदी के प्रति इतना आतंकित क्यों है। पुरुषों में नसबंदी को लेकर कई गलत धारणाएं हैं इनमें से एक यह कि नसबंदी के बाद उनकी ताकत में कमी आ जाएगी दूसरी यह कि भारत जैसे पुरुष प्रधान देश में नसबंदी को मर्दानगी से जोड़कर देखा जाता है, ऐसे में समाज की ओर से तो महिलाओं पर नसबंदी का दबाव बन ही जाता है साथ ही साथ स्वास्थ्य प्रणाली भी महिलाओं पर ये जिम्मेदारी डालने की कोशिश करती है। फिर स्वास्थ्य कर्मचारियों के लिए महिलाओं को बहलाना भी पुरुषों के मुकाबले

ज्यादा आसान होता है, नतीजा नसबंदी शिविरों में ज्यादातर महिलाओं को ही देखा जाता है। वरिष्ठ चिकित्सक डाक्टर रमेश चन्द्र श्रीवास्तव ने बताया कि महिलाओं में नसबंदी की प्रक्रिया पुरुषों की अपेक्षा ज्यादा जटिल होती है। इसके अलावा पुरुष नसबंदी से न तो शारीरिक कमजोरी आती है और न ही संक्रमण का डर रहता है। इसके लिए बहुत सामान्य सा आपरेशन है जिसमें आधे घंटे से भी कम का समय लगता है। यहाँ तक कि लाभार्थी को अस्पताल में रहने की जरूरत भी नहीं पड़ती तथा वह आपरेशन के आधे घंटे के बाद अपने घर भी जा सकते हैं। उनमें किसी भी प्रकार के शारीरिक बदलाव या दिनचर्या पर कोई प्रभाव नहीं पड़ता है और न ही नसबंदी से भविष्य में किसी तरह की स्वास्थ्यजनित समस्या होती है। पुरुष नसबंदी को लेकर पुरुषों को अपनी सोच बदलने की जरूरत है और यह समझना है कि परिवार नियोजन अकेले पत्नी की जिम्मेदारी नहीं है सभी पुरुषों को अपनी सोच बदलनी होगी। बस्ती जनपद में 2023 में 2 हजार 4 सौ 90 महिलाओं ने नसबंदी करायी वहीं सिर्फ 36 पुरुषों ने ही नसबंदी कराया इस वर्ष अगस्त 2024 तक 223 महिलाओं ने नसबंदी कराया और वहीं केवल 10 पुरुषों ने नसबंदी कराया है।

समाज सेविका अंकिता श्रीवास्तव का कहना है कि अगर हम महिलाओं को सारी जिम्मेदारी ढोनी पड़ेगी तो पुरुष क्या करेंगे परिवार नियोजन की जिम्मेदारी सिर्फ हमारी ही नहीं है बल्कि पुरुषों की भी है, पुरुषों को हमेशा पीछे कर दिया जाता है। पुरुषों के मन में यह भ्रांति बैठी हुई है कि नसबंदी ऑपरेशन के बाद उनके पौरुष पर प्रभाव पड़ता है जबकि ऐसा कुछ भी नहीं है। जिन लोगों के नसबंदी ऑपरेशन हो चुके हैं उनसे बात की जाए तो पता चलता है कि वह सामान्य जीवन जी रहे हैं। महिला नसबंदी की तुलना में पुरुष नसबंदी कहीं ज्यादा आसान और बेहतर होती है। इसमें तो सर्जिकल प्रक्रिया भी बहुत ज्यादा गंभीर नहीं है। पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने के पीछे दो मुख्य कारण हैं। पहला यह कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पुरुष हेल्थ वर्कर की कमी है। गांव में आशा और एएनएम महिलाएं हैं जिनका पूरा ध्यान महिलाओं और बच्चों पर है। ऐसे में पुरुषों की जागरूकता का काम प्रभावित होता है। दूसरा कारण है कि पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने पर किसी भी अधिकारी की जवाबदेही तय नहीं होती। संविधान में लिखा है कि पुरुष और महिला में भेद नहीं है लेकिन जहां भेद हो रहा उसे दूर करने के उपाय भी नहीं सोचा जा रहा है। सरकार को चाहिए कि आकड़ों पर नजर डाले और परिवार नियोजन की जिम्मेदारी पुरुषों पर भी डाले।

भारत में परिवार नियोजन की जिम्मेदारी सिर्फ महिलाओं की ही क्यों है पुरुष नसबंदी से क्यों घबराते हैं उत्तर प्रदेश में भी महिला और पुरुष नसबंदी के बीच का यह अंतर साफ नजर आता है। सरकार द्वारा नसबंदी करने के लिए व्यापक प्रचार-प्रसार भी किया जाता है, लेकिन नसबंदी के लिए पुरुष सामने नहीं आते सिर्फ महिलाओं को आगे लाकर उनकी नसबंदी करा दिया जाता है जो कि महिलाओं के लिए ठीक नहीं है। जनसंख्या के नियंत्रण के लिए सबसे

जरूरी सामाजिक स्तर पर सोच में बदलाव लाना है। परिवारों में आज भी बच्चों के नियंत्रण का दबाव महिलाओं पर होता है। जबकि पुरुष अपने पुरुषार्थ के दंभ में इस पर विचार नहीं करते हैं। यदि विचार करते भी हैं तो नसबंदी के विकल्प को स्वीकार नहीं करते। क्योंकि नसबंदी उनकी समाज निर्मित मानसिक संरचना में पुरुषार्थ पर प्रश्न चिन्ह अंकित कर देती है। हालांकि विकल्प के तौर पर गर्भ निरोध गोलियां भी मौजूद हैं लेकिन ये गोलियां किसी न किसी तौर पर महिलाओं के स्वास्थ्य पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव डालती हैं। ये ही वजह है कि महिलाएं इन दवाओं की जगह नसबंदी के विकल्प को अपनाती हैं। आबादी बढ़ाने के लिए सिर्फ महिलाएं ही जिम्मेदार है कब तक महिलाओं को आगे करके उन पर अत्याचार किया जायेगा इस बारे में सरकार को सोचना चाहिए और कड़े कदम उठाना चाहिए। महिला और पुरुष की संख्या हमेशा बराबर की होनी चाहिए तभी समाज में अच्छा सन्देश जायेगा। नसबन्दी प्रक्रिया में महिलाओं की संख्या पुरुष की संख्या में आधे से भी अधिक है। केवल महिलाओं को आधी आबादी माना गया है लेकिन उनको हर जगह पुरुष की अपेक्षा कम सम्मान दिया जाता है।

पुरुषों में मर्दानगी खोने का डर हावी विश्व में जनसंख्या के स्तर पर भारत दूसरा बड़ा देश है। अगर जनसंख्या ऐसे ही बढ़ती रही तो आने वाले समय में भारत, चीन को भी पीछे छोड़कर नंबर वन की भूमिका में आ जाएगा। इसका कारण जनसंख्या विस्फोट और जनसंख्या को नियंत्रित करने वाला कोई पैमाना नहीं होना है। जनसंख्या का तेजी से बढ़ना भारत को सामाजिक, आर्थिक दोनों ही क्षेत्रों में पीछे कर रहा है। जनसंख्या के बढ़ते दबाव से हमारे सीमित प्राकृतिक संसाधनों का तेजी से दोहन हो रहा है, बेरोजगारी का स्तर भी उसी तेजी से बढ़ रहा है। बढ़ते जनसंख्या की वजह से सामाजिकता खत्म हो रही है और शहरों में एकल प्रवृत्ति तेजी से बढ़ रही है। अगर कोई ठोस कदम नहीं उठाया गया तो यह जनसंख्या विस्फोट भारत के लिए हर दृष्टि से खतरनाक साबित होगा।

पुरुषों को नसबंदी के लिए प्रोत्साहित करने के लिए हर साल नवंबर में नसबंदी पखवाड़ा भी मनाया जाता है। इस दौरान पुरुषों को जानकारी दी जाती है कि नसबंदी करवाने से पुरुषों में कामेच्छा, पौरुष, यौन सुख आदि में किसी तरह की कमी नहीं आएगी। इसके बाद भी पुरुष नसबंदी के लिए कम ही आगे आते हैं। दिलचस्प बात ये है कि नसबंदी के लिए सरकार की ओर से पुरुषों को महिलाओं के मुकाबले ज्यादा पैसा दिया जाता है फिर भी पुरुष नसबंदी शिविरों में बढ़-चढ़कर भाग नहीं लेते।

पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने के पीछे दो मुख्य कारण हैं। पहला यह कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पुरुष हेल्थ वर्कर की कमी है। गांव में आशा और एनएएम महिलाएं हैं, जिनका पूरा ध्यान महिलाओं और बच्चों पर है। ऐसे में पुरुषों की जागरूकता का काम प्रभावित होता है। दूसरा कारण है कि पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने पर किसी भी अधिकारी की जवाबदेही तय नहीं होती। संविधान में लिखा है

कि पुरुष और महिला में भेद नहीं है, लेकिन जहां भेद हो रहा उसे दूर करने के उपाय भी नहीं सोचे जा रहे। महिलाओं के अनुपात में पुरुषों की कम नसबंदी पर स्वास्थ्य विशेषज्ञ डाक्टर पी0के0 चौधरी ने भी चिंता जाहिर करते हुए कहा है कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पुरुषों को नसबंदी के लिए प्रेरित करने का काम ठीक से नहीं हो रहा। साथ ही नसबंदी को लेकर स्वास्थ्य विभाग जो टारगेट निर्धारित करता है उसमें भी अलग से पुरुष नसबंदी पर ध्यान नहीं दिया जाता।

महिलाएं ढो रहीं परिवार नियोजन की जबाबदेही का भार विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन की रिपोर्ट के अनुसार दुनिया भर में 10 करोड़ से ज्यादा महिलाएं गर्भ निरोधक गोलियों का इस्तेमाल करती हैं। 1960 के दशक में गर्भनिरोधक गोलियों की शुरुआत के बाद से ही इसके इस्तेमाल से अलग-अलग तरह के साइड इफेक्ट्स देखने को मिले हैं। डॉ0 वीके वर्मा कहते हैं कि गर्भनिरोधक गोलियों के इस्तेमाल से प्रति दस हजार में से पांच से बारह महिलाओं में खून का थक्का जमने की शिकायत सामने आती है। और इनमें से कुछ महिलाओं की मौत होती है। इसका मतलब यह कतई नहीं है कि गर्भनिरोधक गोलियां महिलाओं के लिए असुरक्षित हैं। 2010-11 में भारत में करीब 95 फीसदी महिलाओं ने नसबंदी को अपनाया। जबकि पुरुषों में यह दर काफी कम रही।

यह विचारणीय है कि क्यों महिलाओं की अपेक्षा पुरुष नसबंदी से भागते हैं। यहां तक कि अस्थायी रूप से गर्भधारण को रोकने के लिए अपनी सेक्स लाइफ में कॉन्डोम तक का इस्तेमाल करने से परहेज करते हैं। जबकि यह दोनों ही साधन स्त्री और पुरुष दोनों के स्वास्थ्य और सुरक्षा का आधार है। इस संबंध में पुरुषों के समाज मनोविज्ञान को समझने की आवश्यकता है। यह भी समझने की जरूरत है कि परिवार और स्वास्थ्य के प्रति जिम्मेदारियों से सजग, समाज का यह वर्ग नसबंदी के प्रति इतना आतंकित क्यों है। पुरुषों में नसबंदी को लेकर कई गलत धारणाएं हैं इनमें से एक यह कि नसबंदी के बाद उनकी ताकत में कमी आ जाएगी दूसरी यह कि भारत जैसे पुरुष प्रधान देश में नसबंदी को मर्दानगी से जोड़कर देखा जाता है, ऐसे में समाज की ओर से तो महिलाओं पर नसबंदी का दबाव बन ही जाता है साथ ही साथ स्वास्थ्य प्रणाली भी महिलाओं पर ये जिम्मेदारी डालने की कोशिश करती है।

फिर स्वास्थ्य कर्मचारियों के लिए महिलाओं को बहलाना भी पुरुषों के मुकाबले ज्यादा आसान होता है, नतीजा नसबंदी शिविरों में ज्यादातर महिलाओं को ही देखा जाता है। वरिष्ठ चिकित्सक डाक्टर रमेश चन्द्र श्रीवास्तव ने बताया कि महिलाओं में नसबंदी की प्रक्रिया पुरुषों की अपेक्षा ज्यादा जटिल होती है। इसके अलावा पुरुष नसबंदी से न तो शारीरिक कमजोरी आती है और न ही संक्रमण का डर रहता है। इसके लिए बहुत सामान्य सा आपरेशन है जिसमें आधे घंटे से भी कम का समय लगता है। यहा तक कि लाभार्थी को अस्पताल में रहने की जरूरत भी नहीं पड़ती तथा वह आपरेशन के आधे घंटे के बाद अपने घर भी जा सकते हैं। उनमें किसी भी प्रकार

के शारीरिक बदलाव या दिनचर्या पर कोई प्रभाव नहीं पड़ता है और न ही नसबंदी से भविष्य में किसी तरह की स्वास्थ्यजनित समस्या होती है।

पुरुष नसबंदी को लेकर पुरुषों को अपनी सोच बदलने की जरूरत है और यह समझना है कि परिवार नियोजन अकेले पत्नी की जिम्मेदारी नहीं है सभी पुरुषों को अपनी सोच बदलनी होगी। बस्ती जनपद में 2023 में 2 हजार 4 सौ 90 महिलाओं ने नसबंदी कराई वहीं सिर्फ 36 पुरुषों ने ही नसबंदी कराया इस वर्ष अगस्त 2024 तक 223 महिलाओं ने नसबंदी कराया और वहीं केवल 10 पुरुषों ने नसबंदी कराया है। समाज सेविका अंकिता श्रीवास्तव का कहना है कि अगर हम महिलाओं को सारी जिम्मेदारी ढोनी पड़ेगी तो पुरुष क्या करेंगे परिवार नियोजन की जिम्मेदारी सिर्फ हमारी ही नहीं है बल्कि पुरुषों की भी है, पुरुषों को हमेशा पीछे कर दिया जाता है। पुरुषों के मन में यह भ्रांति बैठी हुई है कि नसबंदी ऑपरेशन के बाद उनके पौरुष पर प्रभाव पड़ता है जबकि ऐसा कुछ भी नहीं है। जिन लोगों के नसबंदी ऑपरेशन हो चुके हैं उनसे बात की जाए तो पता चलता है कि वह सामान्य जीवन जी रहे हैं। महिला नसबंदी की तुलना में पुरुष नसबंदी कहीं ज्यादा आसान और बेहतर होती है। इसमें तो सर्जिकल प्रक्रिया भी बहुत ज्यादा गंभीर नहीं है। पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने के पीछे दो मुख्य कारण हैं।

पहला यह कि ग्रामीण क्षेत्र में पुरुष हेल्थ वर्कर की कमी है। गांव में आशा और एएनएम महिलाएं हैं जिनका पूरा ध्यान महिलाओं और बच्चों पर है। ऐसे में पुरुषों की जागरूकता का काम प्रभावित होता है। दूसरा कारण है कि पुरुष नसबंदी कम होने पर किसी भी अधिकारी की जवाबदेही तय नहीं होती। संविधान में लिखा है कि पुरुष और महिला में भेद नहीं है लेकिन जहां भेद हो रहा उसे दूर करने के उपाय भी नहीं सोचा जा रहा है। सरकार को चाहिए कि आकड़ों पर नजर डाले और परिवार नियोजन की जिम्मेदारी पुरुषों पर भी डाले।



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प्रसव और गरिमा: स्वास्थ्य के नाम पर गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ हिंसा

By *Suman Parmar*, thethirdeyehindi.in

ऑब्स्टेट्रिक हिंसा गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ प्रसव के दौरान किया जाने वाला अमानवीय व्यवहार है, जो उनकी गरिमा और अधिकारों का खुला उल्लंघन है।



चित्रांकन: आस्था शर्मा

इरावती, इंदौर के पास के छोटे से गांव बेगमखेडी की रहने वाली है। जब वह अपनी पहली डिलीवरी के लिए इंदौर के सरकारी अस्पताल में भर्ती हुई, तो उसे उम्मीद नहीं थी कि पहली संतान के होने की खुशी, इतनी जल्दी ज़िंदगी भर के सदमे में बदल जाएगी। अस्पताल के मेटर्निति वॉर्ड में इरावती को घंटों अपनी टांगें खोलकर लेटे रहना पड़ा। उसे बहुत ज़्यादा शर्म महसूस हो रही थी क्योंकि वॉर्ड में न सिर्फ नर्स बल्कि दूसरे मरीजों के परिवारजन भी आ-जा रहे थे। इरावती बताती है कि उसकी बहन जब उसे ढकने की कोशिश करती, तो नर्स उसे डांट देती। एक महिला डॉक्टर ने तो एक पुरुष डॉक्टर को उसके निचले हिस्से को छूने के लिए कहा, जिससे उसे शर्म और घृणा महसूस हुई। वह दर्द से कम, शर्म और गुस्से से ज़्यादा रो रही थी, लेकिन किसी को उसकी परवाह नहीं थी।

21 साल की करूणा के लिए पहली बार मां बनना एक दर्दनाक अनुभव था जिसने उसे जीवन भर के लिए डरा दिया। वजन कम होने की वजह से सरकारी अस्पताल में डॉक्टर न सिर्फ उसे तरह-तरह की दवाइयां खिलाती रहीं, बल्कि उसे इस बात के लिए भी कोसती रहीं कि उसकी

वजह से उसके होने वाले बच्चे के साथ कुछ भी बुरा हो सकता है। डिलीवरी के दिन अर्धनग्न स्थिति में जब वो लेबर रूम में दर्द से तपड़ रही थी और शर्म के मारे अपने निचले हिस्से को बार-बार ढकने की कोशिश कर रही थी तब एक नर्स ने उससे कहा, “मर्द के सामने तो कपड़े खोलकर बैठ जाती है, हमारे सामने टांगे भी नहीं खोली जा रही”। नर्स ने दर्द में जोर से चिल्लाने पर करुणा को धमकी दी कि वो उसे थप्पड़ लगा देगी।

लेबर रूम के भीतर महिलाओं के साथ इस तरह के दुर्व्यवहार, अनादर, उनके साथ बदतमीजी आदि घटनाओं को नॉन-मेडिकल हिंसा की श्रेणी में रखा जाता है। इसपर बातचीत की शुरुआत 1990 के दशक के उत्तरार्ध में मुख्य रूप से लैटिन अमेरिका के देशों में वहां की स्थानीय महिलाओं द्वारा अपने-अपने देशों में प्रसव प्रक्रिया को लगातार एक रोग में बदलने की कोशिश और इसके लिए अपनाए जा रहे हथकंडों के खिलाफ आवाज उठाने से हुई। उसके बाद यूरोपीय देश और अमेरिका – जहां सबसे ज़्यादा संस्थानिक डिलीवरी होती है, गर्भ के दौरान महिलाओं के साथ होने वाले अपमानजनक व्यवहार, यातना, दुर्व्यवहार और शारीरिक हिंसा पर नारीवादी विचारकों एवं स्वास्थ्य के क्षेत्र में काम करने वाले कार्यकर्ताओं ने बहुत कुछ लिखा।

भारत में 2010 के आसपास इन घटनाओं का संज्ञान लिया गया। सेंटर फॉर विमेन स्टडीज़ से जुड़ी प्रोफेसर बिजोया रॉय कहती हैं, “हमारे यहां प्रसूति हिंसा पर विचार स्वास्थ्य आंदोलनों से नहीं आया बल्कि विदेशी नारीवादी विचारकों ने प्रेरित किया कि हम अपने यहां हॉस्पिटल या नर्सिंग होम में गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ होने वाले व्यवहार को परखें।”

विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन और नारीवादी विचारक इसे ‘ऑब्सेटेट्रिक हिंसा’ कहते हैं – यह गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ प्रसव के दौरान किया जाने वाला अमानवीय व्यवहार है, जो उनकी गरिमा और अधिकारों का खुला उल्लंघन है। कुछ लोगों को लगता है कि इसके लिए “प्रजनन हिंसा” शब्द में अधिक बारीकियां हैं, और कुछ का मानना है कि इस मुद्दे से निपटने में “हिंसा” शब्द का उपयोग अधिक सही है।

ऑब्सेटेट्रिक हिंसा या गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ होने वाली हिंसा क्या है?

विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन (डब्ल्यूएचओ) के अनुसार गर्भ के दौरान या प्रसूति गृह (लेबर रूम) में गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ होने वाली हिंसा, प्रसूति हिंसा या ऑब्सेटेट्रिक हिंसा कहलाती है।

यह शारीरिक, मानसिक, भावनात्मक एवं मौखिक रूप से की जाने वाली हिंसा है जो संस्थागत ढांचे के भीतर गर्भवती महिलाओं से उनकी स्वायत्तता, खुद के शरीर पर उनके इच्छितार से उन्हें वंचित करती है।

मतलब, संस्थागत ढांचे जैसे हॉस्पिटल, नर्सिंग होम, स्वास्थ्य केंद्र जैसी जगहों पर प्रसूति गृह या लेबर रूम के भीतर महिला के साथ होने वाली हिंसा की घटनाओं को स्वास्थ्य कर्मियों द्वारा महिलाओं के शरीर और प्रजनन प्रक्रियाओं के इस्तेमाल के रूप में परिभाषित किया गया है। इसमें अमानवीय व्यवहार, लेबर में होने वाले दर्द की अनदेखी, दवाइयों का अनौचित्यपूर्ण

उपयोग, ज़बरदस्ती सी-सेक्शन करना, गर्भवती महिला को अनावश्यक रूप से दवाइयां खिलाना और एक प्राकृतिक प्रक्रिया को किसी रोग में परिवर्तित करना शामिल है।

जिसका परिणाम महिला द्वारा खुद के शरीर और अपनी यौनिकता के बारे में स्वतंत्र रूप से निर्णय लेने की क्षमता और स्वायत्तता खोने के रूप में होता है और जो महिलाओं के जीवन की गुणवत्ता पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव डालता है। (सेहत संस्था, लेबर रूम वॉयलेंस रिपोर्ट) जैसा प्रेरणा के साथ हुआ। लेबर पेन के दौरान अचानक से उसे बताया गया कि उसका बच्चा ऑपरेशन से होगा। उसके लिए यह अबतक अनसुनी बात थी, उस पल उसे कुछ नहीं पता था कि उसके और होने वाले बच्चे के साथ क्या-क्या हो रहा है और उसका क्या असर हो सकता है!

ऑब्सेट्रिक हिंसा - ज़बरदस्ती सी सेक्शन करना

वो अक्टूबर का महीना था। एक तरफ बाज़ार से लेकर गली-मोहल्ले में त्योहार का शोरगुल फैला था तो दूसरी तरफ झारखंड के एक संपन्न शहर जमशेदपुर के एक मध्यवर्गीय घर पर परिवार की सबसे बड़ी बेटी की पहली संतान के आने की तैयारियां चल रही थीं। ‘पहला बच्चा मायके में होगा’, ससुराल वालों ने ये कहकर दूसरे महीने में ही प्रेरणा को उसके घर भेज दिया था। घर के पास ही एक भरोसेमंद नर्सिंग होम में जांच करवाने के साथ प्रेरणा ने वहां अपना रजिस्ट्रेशन करवा लिया।

पूरे नौ महीने उसने हर एक सलाह और नुस्खे को कभी खुशी से तो कभी घरवालों की ज़बरदस्ती के आगे हार मान कर फॉलो किया जो यह कहते हुए दी जाती कि इससे बच्चा स्वस्थ और तंदुरुस्त पैदा होगा (इसमें नारियल खाने से बेटा पैदा होगा जैसी सलाहें भी शामिल थीं)। इन सलाहों में एक बात जो उसने पूरी शिद्दत से निभाई वह थी घर में पोछा लगाना और सीढ़ियों से ऊपर नीचे करना। घर-परिवार की महिलाएं ही नहीं डॉक्टर और नर्सों ने भी प्रेरणा को यही सलाह दी कि नॉर्मल डिलीवरी के लिए पोछा ज़रूर लगाओ। ड्यू डेट के नज़दीक आने तक प्रेरणा ने घर में नियमित पोछा लगाया।

उसकी बस एक ही ख्वाहिश थी – बच्चा नॉर्मल डिलीवरी से हो! नियमित जांच के दौरान डॉक्टर भी उसे आश्चस्त करते कि नॉर्मल डिलीवरी ही होगी। 22 मई की सुबह जब उसे दर्द उठा तो घरवालों ने नर्सिंग होम में भर्ती करा दिया। प्रेरणा की मां उसके साथ थी। उसे लेबर पेन शुरू हो चुका था और वे मैटरनिटी वॉर्ड में डॉक्टर के आने का इंतज़ार कर रहे थे।

एक-दो घंटे के बाद एक महिला डॉक्टर ने आकर कहा कि प्रेरणा को ऑपरेशन रूम में ले जा रहे हैं। दोनों मां-बेटी पूरी तरह से घबरा गए। “क्या हुआ, सब ठीक तो है?” मां लगातार नर्स से सवाल कर रही थी। नर्स का एक ही जवाब था कि डॉक्टर आकर बताएंगे।

अब प्रेरणा के बिस्तर के आसपास का माहौल एकदम बदलने लगा। उसे ऑपरेशन थियेटर में ले जाने के लिए तैयार किया जाने लगा। एक नर्स ने मां से कंसेंट फॉर्म पर साइन करने को कहा जिसमें लिखा था – ‘ऑपरेशन के दौरान अगर बच्चा या मां या दोनों को कोई नुकसान

होता है, दोनों की या किसी एक की जान चली जाती है तो इसमें हॉस्पिटल की कोई ज़िम्मेदारी नहीं होगी.'

मां ने कंसेंट फॉर्म पर साइन कर दिया और कुछ देर बाद सी-सेक्शन से प्रेरणा की बेटी पैदा हुई. बच्ची बिल्कुल तंदुरुस्त और स्वस्थ थी. घर में खुशी का माहौल था. पर, प्रेरणा चाह कर भी पहली संतान के जीवन में आने की खुशी को पूरी तरह अनुभव नहीं कर पा रही थी. कई तरह की उलझने और परेशानियां उसे बेचैन कर रही थीं.

डिलीवरी के बाद प्रेरणा पांच दिनों तक नर्सिंग होम में रही और डिस्चार्ज के समय नर्सिंग होम ने 96 हजार का बिल बनाया क्योंकि वो अपने मायके में थी इसलिए ये खर्च भी उसके माता-पिता को उठाना पड़ा. उसे इस बात का बुरा लगा लेकिन सबसे ज़्यादा बड़ा धोखा उसने अपने डॉक्टर और नर्सिंग होम से महसूस किया जिनकी बातों पर वह आंख मूंद कर भरोसा कर रही थी. पर, डिलीवरी के बाद जो शारीरिक बदलाव प्रेरणा के जीवन में आए वो किसी हथौड़े के वार की तरह थे. लगातार बढ़ते वज़न और टांकों के आसपास बार-बार होने वाले घावों ने प्रेरणा को शारीरिक और मानसिक, दोनों तरह से कमजोर कर दिया!

पर, प्रेरणा के साथ जो हुआ वो कोई अकेली घटना नहीं है. हमारे आसपास सी-सेक्शन से बच्चा पैदा होना बहुत आम घटना है. और इन तथ्यों पर भी ध्यान न देना आम है कि इस प्रकार की डिलीवरी के बाद बहुत सारी महिलाएं कई तरह की शारीरिक परेशानियों से गुजरती हैं!

बिजोया कहती हैं, “शोध के दौरान हम जितनी महिलाओं से मिले ज़्यादातर ने कहा कि उनको एकदम अंत में जाकर बताया गया कि आपका सी-सेक्शन होगा. ऑपरेशन थियेटर में ले जाने से ठीक पहले आप गर्भवती महिला को यह नहीं बता सकते कि इसमें क्या होगा, क्यों होगा...! उस पल में कोई भी महिला क्या बोलेगी उसके लिए तो ये एक लाचारी भरी परिस्थिति है.”

विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन (डब्लूएचओ) का कहना है कि अगर महिला को यह नहीं बताया जा रहा कि इसकी ज़रूरत क्यों है, तो यह हिंसा है.

वहीं सी-सेक्शन को लेकर एक दूसरा तर्क यह है कि यह जीवन बचाने की एक प्रक्रिया है. पत्रकार मेनका राव, जो स्वास्थ्य, पोषण और न्याय के मामलों पर लेखन करती हैं, उनका कहना है कि डिलीवरी के समय और ठीक उससे पहले कई मामलों में डिलीवरी की जटिलताएं जैसे, बच्चे के अंदर पलट जाना, या गर्भनाल उसके गले में फंस जाना; ऐसे कई कारण हैं जिनकी वजह से सी सेक्शन करना ज़रूरी हो जाता है.

पर यहां यह देखने की ज़रूरत है कि यह सुविधा किसके लिए उपलब्ध है और कहां यह सबसे ज़्यादा देखने को मिलता है – प्राइवेट सेक्टर या पब्लिक सेक्टर के अस्पतालों में?

सरकारी बनाम प्राइवेट अस्पताल में सी-सेक्शन (सब-टेक्सट)

मेनका का कहना है कि अक्सर होता यह है कि सरकारी अस्पताल में अगर डिलीवरी में किसी तरह की कोई पेचीदगी आ जाती है और सर्जरी की ज़रूरत होती है तो कभी डॉक्टर नहीं हैं, तो

कभी सर्जरी का सामान नहीं होता, या ब्लड बैंक की सुविधा नहीं है जैसी बहुत सारी दिक्कतों का हवाला देकर गर्भवति महिला को एक अस्पताल से दूसरे अस्पताल दौड़ाया जाता है. इसलिए सी-सेक्शन के आंकड़े सरकारी अस्पतालों में कम देखने को मिलते हैं. मतलब शहरी क्षेत्रों और उच्च-संसाधन वाले राज्यों में सी-सेक्शन की दर अधिक है, जबकि ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों और कम संसाधन वाले राज्यों में यह दर कम होती है.

भारत में राष्ट्रीय परिवार स्वास्थ्य सर्वेक्षण (NFHS-5) की एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, सी-सेक्शन डिलीवरी का चलन तेजी से बढ़ रहा है. 2005-06 में यह 8.5 फीसदी, 2015-16 में 17.2 फीसदी और 2019-21 में यह बढ़कर 21.5 फीसदी हो चुका है, जो विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन द्वारा सुझाए गए 10-15% के आदर्श से अधिक है

समय के साथ, यह देखा गया है कि निजी अस्पतालों में सी-सेक्शन प्रसव का प्रतिशत सार्वजनिक सुविधाओं की तुलना में अधिक रहा है. निजी अस्पतालों में यह दर 47.4% तक पहुंच गई, जबकि सरकारी अस्पतालों में यह लगभग 14.3% रही.

वहीं, सी-सेक्शन पर बात करते हुए बीबीसी हिंदी की एक रिपोर्ट के हवाले से डॉक्टरों का तर्क है कि महिलाएं शुभ महरत, पति, सास-ससुर के कहने पर शुभ घड़ी देखकर ही बच्चा पैदा करना चाहती हैं लेकिन यहां सवाल यह उठता है कि डॉक्टर्स की अपनी नैतिकता क्या है? वे क्यों इन बातों को तर्जिह देते हैं.

यहां एक बात गौर करने की यह भी है कि कई बार ज़्यादा उम्र में बच्चा पैदा करने से होने वाली दिक्कतों और लेबर के दर्द को सहने से बचने के लिए भी महिलाएं खुद ही सी-सेक्शन के ज़रिए बच्चा पैदा करना चाहती हैं. नारीवादी विचारकों का कहना है कि महिलाओं द्वारा खुद से सी-सेक्शन का चुनाव करना कहीं जाकर उन्हें थोड़ी एजेंसी तो देता है लेकिन ऐसे में डॉक्टर और स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों की ज़िम्मेदारी है कि वे इसके बारे में सही जानकारी उपलब्ध कराएं क्योंकि जानकारी न देना या उनकी सहमति के बिना ही निर्णय लेना, महिलाओं को असहाय महसूस करवा सकता है.

असल में डॉक्टरी किताबों के अनुसार सी-सेक्शन एक खास मेडिकल कंडीशन में ही किया जा सकता है, क्योंकि इससे महिला के साथ बहुत तरह की शारीरिक, मानसिक, और स्वास्थ्य संबंधित परेशानियां हो सकती हैं. जैसे, सर्जरी के बाद चरिरे वाली जगह पर संक्रमण का खतरा, पेट की मांसपेशियों में कमजोरी, कॉन्सटिपेशन आदि. हालांकि हर महिला का अनुभव अलग होता है, लेकिन ये कुछ सामान्य चिंताएं या चुनौतियां हैं जो सी-सेक्शन से निकलकर आती हैं.

“सरकारी हो या प्राइवेट, हिंसा दोनों जगह है. फर्क सिर्फ इतना है कि दोनों जगहों पर इसकी प्रकृति अलग-अलग है. प्राइवेट में यह सामने से दिखाई नहीं देता क्योंकि वहां मामला रिवेन्यू का है. हॉस्पिटल या नर्सिंग होम चलाने के लिए पैसे चाहिए. सरकारी में भीड़ ज़्यादा है, लोग कम हैं. स्वास्थ्य पर सरकार का बजट वैसे ही कम से कम होता है. लेकिन इसका मतलब ये नहीं है कि इसकी वजह से आप किसी के साथ बुरा वर्ताव करेंगे.” बिजोया कहती हैं.

ऑब्सेट्रिक वायलेंस/ प्रसूति हिंसा: अपमान, दुर्व्यवहार और गालियों से बात करना

भारत में घरों में होने वाली डिलीवरी को कम से कम करने और इसे पूरी तरह सांस्थानिक ढांचे में लाने के लिए 2005 में सरकार जननी सुरक्षा योजना लेकर आई.

इस योजना का उद्देश्य बच्चे के जन्म के समय मां एवं नवजात मृत्यु दर को कम करना और सरकारी अस्पतालों में डिलीवरी को प्रोत्साहित करना है. इससे संस्थागत डिलीवरी में 43 फीसदी की बढ़ोतरी हुई.

विजयनगर, राजस्थान के एक सरकारी अस्पताल में प्रसूति के लिए एडमिट महिला ने बताया कि उसके बगल वाली टेबल पर लेटी महिला दर्द से बेहाल थी लेकिन नर्स उसके साथ लगातार बुरा व्यवहार कर रही थी. एक नर्स ने उससे यहां तक कहा, “हर साल 1400 रु लेने आ जाती है. शर्म तो तुझे आती नहीं. अब क्यों चीख रही है.” (जननी सुरक्षा योजना के अंतर्गत सरकारी अस्पताल में डिलीवरी होने पर मां बनने वाली महिला को आर्थिक मदद दी जाती है. ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों की महिलाओं के लिए यह रकम 1400 रुपए है. इसके लिए महिला को सरकारी अस्पताल में रजिस्ट्रेशन कराना होता है लेकिन यह योजना पहले दो बच्चों की डिलीवरी पर लागू होती है.)

सेहत संस्था से जुड़ी संजीदा अरोड़ा का कहना है, “पब्लिक हेल्थ केयर कर्मचारियों के साथ काम करने के अपने अनुभवों से हमें पता है कि उनके लिए लेबर रूम वॉयलेंस एक सामान्य घटना है. वे प्रसूति गृह में महिलाओं पर चिल्लाते हैं, उन्हें बिस्तर से बांध देते हैं. महिलाओं को बाथरूम जाने से रोका जाता है. उनसे कहा जाता है कि वे चुपचाप से अपने बिस्तर पर लेटी रहें. नर्स उन्हें थप्पड़ मारती हैं.” संजीदा अरोड़ा, संस्था द्वारा लेबर रूम वायलेंस पर किए गए शोध से जुड़ी थीं.

कई महिलाओं के लिए यह हिंसा की दोहरी मार है. ममता का पति दिहाड़ी मजदूरी करता है और शराब के नशे में लगभग रोज उससे मार-पीट करता है. गर्भ के बावजूद वह पूरे दिन घर का काम करती है और सास की सेवा भी करती है. दवाइयों और चेकअप के लिए पास के स्वास्थ्य केंद्र जाना उसके लिए राहत की एक वजह है जहां कुछ समय के लिए ही सही घर के दमघोंटू माहौल से उसे बाहर निकलने का मौका मिलता है. लेकिन, स्वास्थ्य केंद्र में नर्स और दूसरे कर्मचारी उससे ठीक से बात तक नहीं करते. पति काम की तलाश में सुबह ही निकल जाता है. ममता अपने पांच साल के छोटे लड़के को लेकर खुद ही स्वास्थ्य केंद्र जाती है. नर्स इस बात से भी नाराज होती है कि उसका बच्चा इधर-उधर क्यों भाग रहा है, वो उसे संभाल क्यों नहीं सकती. एक दिन नर्स ने ममता को कहा, “सेक्स करने में तो बहुत मज़ा आता है तब बच्चे के बारे में नहीं सोचती, बच्चा करती ही क्यों हो अगर संभाल नहीं सकती.”

ऑब्सेट्रिक वायलेंस/ प्रसूति हिंसा: जाति, धर्म, वर्ग के आधार पर भेदभाव

2020 में ऑनलाइन खबरीया वेबसाइट ‘द प्रिन्ट’ में प्रकाशित एक खबर के अनुसार झारखंड राज्य की राजधानी रांची के एक प्रतिष्ठित सरकारी अस्पताल में बदसलूकी, मार-पीट और

इलाज न मिलने के कारण एक गर्भवती महिला के चार महीने का बच्चा पेट में ही मर गया। राज्य के मुख्यमंत्री के नाम शिकायती पत्र में रिजवाना ने बताया कि अचानक शरीर से खून निकलने के कारण आनन-फानन में अपने भाई के साथ वो रांची के एक सरकारी अस्पताल पहुंची जहां कॉरीडोर में खड़े होते हुए फर्श पर थोड़ा खून गिर गया। फर्श गंदा होता देख वहां मौजूद नर्स ने गुस्से में रिजवाना को उसके धर्म से जोड़कर भद्दी गालियां दीं और कहा कि वो फर्श साफ करे। रिजवाना का शरीर कांप रहा था। फर्श साफ करने में उससे थोड़ी देर हो गई इसपर नर्स ने अपनी चप्पल निकालकर उसे मारना शुरू कर दिया। रिजवाना के भाई ने उसे बचाने की कोशिश की और वहां से उसे दूसरे नर्सिंग होम ले गया जहां पहुंचने पर डॉक्टरों ने उसे बताया कि उसके बच्चे की मौत हो चुकी है। यह उसका पहला बच्चा था।

स्वास्थ्य संस्थाओं में गर्भवती महिलाओं के साथ, जाति, वर्ग, धर्म, भाषा के आधार पर भेदभाव बहुत आम है। इसके आधार पर ही स्वास्थ्यकर्मी अपनी धारणाएं बनाते हैं। कई बार यह भेदभाव बहुत ही बारीक और सहज तरीके से भी होता है। खासकर दलित, आदिवासी और हाशिए पर धकेल दिए गए समुदायों से आने वाली महिलाओं के साथ होने वाले भेदभाव आम नज़र से दिखाई भी नहीं देते।

जैसे पहले से लाइन में लगी दलित महिला को रोककर उसके आधे घंटे बाद आई ऊंची जाति की महिला को चेकअप के लिए पहले भेजना, महिला गरीब है यह जानते हुए उसे एक अस्पताल से दूसरे अस्पताल भेजना, प्रसूता के दर्द को यह कहकर नज़रअंदाज़ करना कि, 'इनकी कम्यूनिटी के लोगों को तो चिल्लाने की आदत है.'

दिल्ली के सफदरजंग अस्पताल के मैटरनिटी वॉर्ड के वेटिंग रूम में बैठे हुए ऐसी बहुत सारी बातें कानों में पड़ीं, जैसे नॉर्थ-ईस्ट की एक महिला को देख कर कहना, "अरे, वो चिकी फिर आ गई है." या एक अन्य महिला के बारे में कहना, "दो बच्चे के बाद फिर आ गई है, यहां एक बच्चे की फीस नहीं दी जा रही...अरे, इनके तो धर्म में ही लिखा है कि बच्चा करो." हमारे टोकने पर जवाब में एक नर्स ने कहा, "कुछ खास समुदाय की महिलाएं तो बिना हिंसा के बात ही नहीं सुनतीं."

बिजोया का कहना है कि स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों के बीच यह आम मानसिकता है, "जबकि सम्पन्न परिवार में भी किसी के तीन बच्चे हो सकते हैं। नीता अंबानी को ही देख लीजिए उनके तीन बच्चे हैं लेकिन उन्हें यह नहीं कहा जाएगा कि उनके तीन बच्चे क्यों हैं, उन्हें इंश्योरेंस पॉलिसी के लिए मना नहीं किया जाएगा, उन्हें सरकारी मैटरनिटी केयर की सुविधाओं से वंचित नहीं किया जाएगा." वर्तमान में सरकारी नियमों के अनुसार अगर आपके दो से ज़्यादा बच्चे हैं तो आपको सरकारी नौकरी नहीं मिल सकती.

ऑब्सेट्रिक वायलेंस/ प्रसूति हिंसा: स्वास्थ्यकर्मी क्या कहते हैं?

सेहत संस्था द्वारा प्रकाशित रिपोर्ट के अनुसार जब नर्सों से पूछा गया कि वे प्रसूता के साथ इस तरह का दुर्व्यवहार क्यों करती हैं तो उन सभी का मानना था कि इस तरह का व्यवहार बहुत

ज़रूरी है, इससे बच्चा पैदा होने की प्रक्रिया में आसानी होती है और महिलाएं उनकी बात सही से मानने को तैयार हो जाती हैं।

एक तरफ अगर नर्सों का तर्क यह है तो दूसरी तरफ डॉक्टरों को लगता है, “महिलाएं हर दर्द को बहुत बड़ा दर्द बना लेती हैं।” ऐसी घटनाएं भी सामने आई हैं जहां डॉक्टर ने लोकल एनिस्थिसिया दिए बिना ही प्रसूता के चीरा लगा दिया या एक केस में तो सी-सेक्शन तक कर डाला!

भारत में प्रसव के दौरान हिंसा पर डॉक्टरों का नज़रिया कई कारणों से जटिल और चुनौतीपूर्ण हो सकता है। अक्सर कई डॉक्टरों को यह एहसास ही नहीं होता कि उनके द्वारा अपनाई गई कुछ प्रक्रियाएं या व्यवहार असम्मानजनक हैं, क्योंकि उन्हें इस बारे में विशेष प्रशिक्षण नहीं मिलता है। जब प्रसव के दौरान महिलाओं के साथ संवेदनशीलता और सम्मान से पेश आने की बात आती है, तो कुछ स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों को यह समझने में कठिनाई होती है कि उनकी कार्यप्रणाली महिला की भावनात्मक और शारीरिक स्थिति पर नकारात्मक प्रभाव डाल सकती है।

दुर्गा वर्नेकर और संगीता रेगे की रिपोर्ट “लेबर रूम में महिलाओं के साथ दुर्व्यवहार: स्वास्थ्य सेवा प्रदाताओं की धारणाएं” भारत में प्रसव संबंधी हिंसा और स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों के दृष्टिकोण पर केंद्रित है, यह बताती है कि भारत में मेडिकल शिक्षा के पाठ्यक्रम में जाति, धर्म और भाषा के आधार पर संवेदनशीलता का प्रशिक्षण पर्याप्त रूप से नहीं दिया जाता, विशेषकर महिलाओं के संदर्भ में।

इस रिपोर्ट के अनुसार, डॉक्टरों और अन्य स्वास्थ्यकर्मियों को पेशेवर आचरण सिखाया जाता है, लेकिन विभिन्न सामाजिक-आर्थिक और सांस्कृतिक समूहों से आने वाली महिलाओं, खासकर हाशिए पर खड़ी महिलाओं, निम्न जाति, अल्पसंख्यक समुदायों या ग्रामीण पृष्ठभूमि से आने वाली महिलाओं को अक्सर सम्मानजनक व्यवहार नहीं मिलता।

स्वास्थ्य पत्रकार मेनका का कहना है कि “जब आपसे भी कम उम्र के रेजिडेंट डॉक्टर आपसे कहते हैं, “आपको पता नहीं है, बच्चा ऐसे नहीं होता” तो बहुत गुस्सा आता है। असल में वे हर एक स्तर पर खुद को बहुत ऊंचाई पर रखकर बात कर रहे होते हैं।”

महिला केंद्रित प्रसव देखभाल कितनी महत्वपूर्ण है इसे लेकर डॉक्टरों को और अधिक जागरूक करने की आवश्यकता है, ताकि प्रसव के दौरान महिलाओं को सम्मानजनक और सुरक्षित माहौल मिल सके। इसके लिए पेशेवर आचरण के साथ-साथ भावनात्मक और मानसिक समर्थन देने वाले प्रशिक्षण भी आवश्यक हैं, जिससे स्वास्थ्य प्रणाली में सकारात्मक बदलाव आ सके।

लेबर रूम वायलेंस: लक्ष्य कार्यक्रम

महिलाओं के साथ होने वाली हिंसा खासकर लेबर रूम हिंसा पर बातचीत तो बहुत लंबे समय से हो रही है, लेकिन इसे स्वास्थ्य व्यवस्था के दायरे में लाकर इसपर मुकम्मल बातचीत 2014 के आसपास ही शुरू हुई जब पहली बार डब्लूएचओ ने इस सिलसिल में एक गाईडलाइंस जारी कीं। भारत में भी इन चर्चाओं ने जोर पकड़ना शुरू किया कि हॉस्पिटल के अंदर, नर्सिंग होम में अच्छा केयर नहीं होता है, बहुत तरह के दुर्व्यवहार होते हैं तो आपको लेबर रूम में केयर देना होगा. समुदाय एवं संस्था के स्तर पर ऐसी कई रिपोर्ट देखने को मिल जाती हैं. इसका परिणाम यह है कि 2018 में सरकार लक्ष्य कार्यक्रम लेकर आई जिसका उद्देश्य गर्भवती महिला और सार्वजनिक स्वास्थ्य संस्थानों में जन्म लेने वाले बच्चे और मां के लिए सुरक्षित प्रसव सुनिश्चित करना है.

मेडिकल साइंस की दुनिया में डिलीवरी या प्रेग्नेंसी एक प्राकृतिक एवं साधारण प्रक्रिया है. लेकिन आज इसे एक अप्राकृतिक या रोग का रूप देने की कोशिश लगातार जारी है.

जिसमें स्वास्थ्य के क्षेत्र में शामिल बड़े व्यापारियों सहित राज्य की भूमिका पर भी सवाल उठाया जा सकता है. संस्थागत डिलीवरी को बढ़ावा देने के लिए तमाम तरह की सरकारी योजनाएं चालू हैं, जैसे जननी सुरक्षा योजना, मातृ वंदना योजना, सुरक्षित मातृत्व अभियान और अन्य; अपने नाम एवं काम से तो ये योजनाएं मां बनने वाली स्त्री को केंद्र में रख, उसकी संपूर्ण देखभाल की बात करती हैं; उन्हें सुरक्षा देने की बात करती हैं. पर इस सुरक्षा के भीतर महिलाओं के जो अनुभव हैं, वे बहुत ही भयावह है जिनपर बात करना बहुत ज़रूरी है. फ़िलहाल ज़मीनी स्तर पर अस्पताल, नर्सिंग होम एवं स्वास्थ्य केंद्र इसे अपनी तरह से ही परिभाषित कर रहे हैं जो ज़रूरी नहीं कि महिलाओं के हित में ही हो.



Suman Parmar, a writer, editor, and translator with over a decade in media and publishing, has worked with BBC and Dainik Bhaskar and edited bestselling books like Devdutt Pattanaik's *Meri Geeta*.

<https://thethirdeyehindi.in/samaaj/prasav-aur-garima-garbhvati-mahilaon-ke-saath-hinsa/>

Reporting on menstrual equity and hygiene.

मेरा पहला पीरीयड आने से पहले मेरी शादी हो चुकी थी और मुझे कुछ नहीं पता था

By Nikku Kumari, youthkiawaaz.com

कहानी का शीर्षक - “मेरा पहला पीरीयड आने से पहले मेरी शादी हो चुकी थी और मुझे कुछ नहीं पता था”

सीमा देवी (मोतिहारी जिला, बिहार) के साथ बातचीत पर आधारित

खेलते-कूदते तो नहीं लेकिन “एक लड़की हूँ”, इस एहसास के साथ मैं बड़ी हुई। महिलाएँ कान में आकर बोलती थी, “बेटा, तुम माहवारी होने लगी या नहीं?” सुनकर ऐसा लगता था कि कोई बहुत बड़ी बीमारी है... घरवालों के सामने जब भी मैंने इसके बारे में माँ से पूछा तो, वह अपना मुँह पल्लू से ढँक मुझे घर के एक कोने में ले जाकर कड़े शब्दों में कहती, “तुम्हें ये सब जानने की अभी कोई जरूरत नहीं है।”

लोगों का यह कहना कि “आपकी बेटी बड़ी हो रही है”, इसका मेरे माता-पिता पर इतना असर हुआ कि उन्होंने मात्र 13 साल की उम्र में मेरी शादी करने का फैसला कर लिया। आखिर वह दिन आ ही गया जब सभी रस्में निभाई जा रही थीं, सभी खुश थे, द्वार पर बारात खड़ी थी, और मैं दुल्हन के जोड़े में खुद को शीशे में निहार रही थी। तभी अचानक मुझे गीलापन महसूस हुआ, आस-पास देखने के बाद जब मैंने अपना लहंगा देखा तो, खुद को लहलुहान देखकर मैं डर गई और खुद से सवाल करने लगी कि “मैंने ऐसा क्या किया है कि मुझसे इतना लहू आ रहा है?”

यहां दो मिनट रुकें और सोचें कि उस वक्त हालात क्या रहे होंगे।

कुछ देर बाद जब माँ मुझे मंडप में ले जाने आईं तब तक मेरी शादी का जोड़ा खराब हो चुका था। ये सब देखकर माँ मुझे खरी खोटी सुनाने लगी और फिर दुबारा से जैसे-तैसे मुझे तैयार किया गया। माँ की खरी खोटी सुनकर मेरी इन आँखों से रहा न गया और वह मंद-मंद छलक पड़ी। न मुझे मेरी गलती का पता था और न उनकी मुझसे शिकायत का कारण। जब मंडप के लिए निकलने ही वाले थे तभी माँ मुझे यही रुकने के लिए बोलकर कोई सूती कपड़ा ढूँढने लगी। अब शादी वाले घर में उन्हें कहाँ से सामान समय पर मिलता इसलिए उन्होंने अपनी सूती साड़ी जो मेरी शादी की खरीदारी में माँ के लिए आयी थी, उसे फाड़ने लगी। मैंने उन्हें रोका,

लेकिन रोकने पर भी उनकी खरी खोटी ही सुनने को मिली। साड़ी के फटे टुकड़े के कई तह बनाकर उन्होंने मुझे दिए। लेकिन देते वक्त, वह यह भूल रही थी कि इसका क्या उपयोग है, इससे पहले उन्होंने मुझे कभी बताया ही नहीं था। फिर उन्होंने मुझे इसका उपयोग बताया और मैंने भी ठीक उसी प्रकार से कपड़ा लगाया और हम मंडप की ओर चल पड़े।

उस समय मेरे पास इतना समय नहीं था कि मैं माँ से इसके बारे कुछ पूछ सकूँ, इसलिए मैंने सोचा कि एक बार शादी ख़तम हो जाए फिर उनसे पूछ लूंगी। लेकिन कहते हैं न, समय रहते ज्ञान मिल जाए तो अच्छा होता है और शादी वाले घर में समय किसी के पास नहीं होता। शादी संपन्न होते-होते भोर हो गयी और चिड़ियों की चहचाहट के साथ मुझे विदा कर दिया गया। सबकुछ ऐसे अचानक हो रहा था जिससे मुझे माँ के साथ अकेले में बात करने तक का समय नहीं मिला। गाड़ी ससुराल की ओर चल पड़ी। मेरी जगह बाकी लड़कियाँ कार में बैठी खुली आँखों से अपने ससुराल के सपने देखते हुए जाती हैं, और मैं तब महावारी के सवाल में उलझी हुयी अपने ससुराल पहुँची।

गाड़ी मेरे ससुराल में मुख्य दरवाजों के सामने रोक दी गयी और फिर रस्म शुरू हो गयी। मंगल गीत गाने वाली औरतों की भीड़ खड़ी थी। लोग नयी दुल्हन यानि मुझे देखने के लिए खड़े थे। सारे रस्म रिवाज हो जाने के बाद जब मैं कार से उतरी, तब मुझे महसूस हुआ कि जो कपड़ा माँ ने दिया था, वह अब भारी हो गया है। काफी देर हो गई थी उस कपड़े को लिए, अब बारी थी उसे बदलने की। लेकिन अभी भी बहुत से रिवाज बाकी थे, जिसके लिए मुझे घर के मंदिर वाले कमरे में ले जाया जा रहा था। अपने लड़खड़ाते कदमों के साथ मैं मंदिर की ओर बढ़ी। मुझे यूँ चलता देखकर सभी आई औरतें बातें बनाने लगीं। तभी एक धीमी-सी आवाज मेरी कानों में पड़ी, “हाय.. हाय, ये तो लंगड़ी पतोहू ले आई अम्मा जी।” और फिर उसी के साथ खड़ी दूसरी औरत – “कहीं इनके साथ धोखा तो नहीं हुआ है।” ये बातें मुझे कमरे में ले जा रही मेरी जेठानी ने भी सुनी, और तभी वह मुझे सबसे अलग ले जाकर मुझसे पूछने लगी, “की हे कनियां, कहला अईसे चल रहलहुं ह?” उनके यह पूछते ही मैंने उन्हें शुरू से सारा कुछ बता दिया। मेरी बातें खत्म होते ही वह हँस पड़ीं और फिर उन्होंने मुझे बिठा कर महावारी के बारे में सब कुछ अच्छे से बताया। अब बारी थी लिए हुए कपड़े को बदलने की, जिसके लिए उन्होंने मुझे ठीक उसी प्रकार से सूती कपड़े को तह करके दिया, जैसा कि माँ ने मुझे दिया था।

“यह कोई काल्पनिक कहानी नहीं, बल्कि सीमा देवी की कहानी है। वह आज भी यह सवाल करती है कि, ‘आखिर मैं तो अपनी माँ जैसी ही थी, फिर मुझसे यह क्यों छुपाया गया? क्या यह बात शादी जैसे रिश्ते से भी बड़ी थी?’”

इस कहानी को पढ़ने के बाद आपके मन में यह जरूर आया होगा कि आज के समय में किसको नहीं मालूम होगा माहवारी के बारे में, जबकि अधिकांश ग्रामीण इलाकों जैसे – बिहार और उत्तर प्रदेश के कुछ इलाकों में आज भी इस पर कोई चर्चा ही नहीं की जाती। और जब चर्चा ही नहीं होगी, तो लोगों को पता कैसे चलेगा। माहवारी, जिसे आज भी समाज में शर्म का मुद्दा माना जाता है, जिस पर बात करने में खुद महिलाएं भी सहज महसूस नहीं करती हैं।

आज कई सारे संगठनों ने इसे एक अहम मुद्दा का दर्जा दिया है, जो इस पर काम कर रहे हैं ग्रामीण इलाकों के लोगों के साथ। अब बारी है आपकी। पहली शुरुआत आपके अपने घर से।



Nikku, a Hindi Content Writer at Goonj, uses storytelling to highlight unheard voices and everyday struggles, inspiring awareness and dialogue. Her writing journey began with Youth Ki Awaaz Hindi.

<https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2024/01/first-period-on-my-wedding-day-hindi-article>

वो 5 दिन... पीरियड्स के दिनों में एक ही पैड में चौराहे पर खड़े रह कर 10 घंटे ड्यूटी की, महिलाओं के लिए वहां वॉशरूम तक नहीं

By *Kavita Swami*, Dainik Bhaskar

रेणुका 8 से 10 घंटे तक चौक पर खड़ी रहती हैं। सूरज सिर पर आग उगलता है, तो कभी बारिश में भीगती हैं। ट्रैफिक संभालना, गाड़ियों को रोकना और चालान काटना उनकी ड्यूटी का हिस्सा है। लेकिन, जब पीरियड्स के दिन आते हैं तो उनकी सबसे बड़ी परेशानी शुरू होती है। जिस चौक पर वो तैनात हैं, वहां आसपास महिलाओं के लिए टॉयलेट तक नहीं है। ऐसे में उन्हें मजबूरी में एक ही पैड में पूरा दिन निकालना पड़ता है।

रेणुका ने बताया कि पीरियड्स के उन 5 दिनों में ड्यूटी करना किसी सजा से कम नहीं लगता। 8 से 10 घंटे की खड़ी ड्यूटी में अगर उन्हें पैड बदलना होता है तो पूरे इलाके में टॉयलेट ढूँढना पड़ता है। कई बार तो ऐसे हालात भी आए जब उन्हें गाड़ी रोक कर किसी दुकान या पेट्रोल पंप के वॉशरूम में जाना पड़ा।

इन दो महिला पुलिसकर्मियों की जुबानी सुनिए उन जवानों की पीड़ा जो पीरियड्स में भी ड्यूटी से नहीं हटतीं...

पूरा दिन खड़े रहकर ड्यूटी दी — सुनीता ने बताया कि ट्रैफिक प्वाइंट्स पर महिला पुलिसकर्मियों की ड्यूटी में कोई रियायत नहीं है। गर्मी में जहां पुरुष पुलिसकर्मी भी परेशान हो जाते हैं, वहां महिलाओं को न वॉशरूम की सुविधा है, न ही पीरियड्स में आराम का समय।

काश जिम्मेदारों को भी शर्मिंदगी हो

ऐसे हालात कई महिला पुलिसकर्मियों के साथ हैं, लेकिन इस पर कोई सुनवाई नहीं। नागौर में करीब 40 महिला पुलिसकर्मी ट्रैफिक प्वाइंट्स पर तैनात हैं।



Kavita Swami, a city reporter with Dainik Bhaskar in Nagaur, covers stories on culture, education, and gender issues, using journalism to foster awareness and social change.

UN heard,
written,
told...

IV.

Identity, Representation & Breaking Stereotypes

Challenging patriarchal norms and demanding authentic, diverse representation in media, sports, and society.

To see and be seen on one's own terms — that is often where liberation begins. This section explores how women and marginalised genders are reclaiming visibility, rewriting narratives, and stepping beyond roles that once confined them. Whether through work, art, sport, or leisure, these stories capture the courage to live beyond the script patriarchy assigns — and to insist on being represented in all their complexity, strength, and contradiction.

From women redefining roles in fields that once shut them out, to those critiquing cinema's gaze or reclaiming the simple right to rest and roam, these narratives illuminate the everyday acts of defiance that expand what womanhood — and indeed humanity — can mean. Together, they remind us that representation is not merely about visibility, but about truth: the power to see, and to be seen, as one truly is.

Redefining Roles: Celebrating women in non-traditional professions and sports.

1. **Pradnya Kelkar Sing** - She Performs Autopsies Fearlessly at Sassoon

Beyond the Screen: Critiquing harmful portrayals in cinema and media.

1. **Subha J Rao** - Vijay Sethupathi Film Maharaja Is An Example Of How Not To Depict Violence On Screen
2. **Tanya Malik** - Hey Filmmakers, It's Time to Pop the Bubble and Hit Hard with Reality

Leisure as Liberation: Framing women's right to public space and leisure.

1. **Chithra Rangarajan** - Reclaiming the Night: A Woman's Journey Through Chennai After Dark (Translated from Tamil)

She Performs Autopsies Fearlessly at Sassoon

By *Pradnya Kelkar Singh*, Daily Pudhari

Words like mortuary or autopsy are enough to send shivers down most people's spines. In government hospitals, this highly critical and risky responsibility has traditionally been handled only by male doctors. But Dr. Ashwini Bhosale has shattered that stereotype. She is the first female MD doctor at Sassoon General Hospital to take charge of post-mortem examinations. So far, she has conducted over 1,500 autopsies.

Dr. Ashwini Bhosale completed her medical education at the Government Medical College in Dhule, followed by an internship at B. J. Medical College, Pune. After gaining four years of hands-on experience in Pune, she decided early on to make a career in forensic medicine.

Accordingly, she pursued her postgraduate degree (MD in Forensic Medicine) from the Department of Forensic Medicine at B. J. Medical College in 2020, officially beginning her professional journey in the same year.

Speaking to Pudhari, Dr. Bhosale said, "My mother was a nurse, so I was exposed to the medical field from childhood. As a child, I regularly watched the TV series 'Forensic Files' and learned a lot from it. I have always believed that the human body is like that of any other animal, and that's why I never felt afraid while performing autopsies."

Dr. Bhosale began working on July 14, 2020, during the first wave of COVID-19, when post mortems were conducted in limited numbers. At that time, her duties also included verifying documents, handing over bodies to municipal workers, obtaining consent from relatives, and counseling grieving families.

She added, "During an autopsy, even a minor mistake while determining the cause or manner of death can send an innocent person to prison or let a criminal walk free. The dead cannot speak

— it's our responsibility to ensure they get justice through precise work. Performing autopsies is my profession, and I approach it with the same dedication and

sincerity I would give to any other field. I've been fortunate to receive constant guidance from my seniors throughout this journey."

Plans for Research in Human Taphonomy

Dr. Bhosale said she developed a deep interest in studying the effects of decomposition on the human body during her student days, when she attended several medical conferences. She learned about the Human Taphonomy Center, which studies how long it takes for a body to decompose, what insects colonize it, and how factors like water, soil, and climate affect the process.

This specialized field is currently researched mainly abroad. Dr. Bhosale now aims to pursue advanced studies overseas and bring that knowledge back to India to start research in human taphonomy here.



Pradnya Kelkar Singh, Senior Reporter at Daily Pudhari in Pune, has 15 years' experience covering health, culture, and gender equality stories, with a focus on civic issues and social impact.

Vijay Sethupathi film *Maharaja* is an example of how not to depict violence on screen

By **Subha J Rao**, *thenewsminute.com*

The scenes depicting sexual violence are especially sensationalised, with disturbing visuals and a piercing background score.



Full disclosure: I had access to the unsubtle elements of Nithilan Swaminathan's *Maharaja* before I watched the movie. And, despite knowing every 'twist' and 'shock value incident' beforehand, I was left shocked.

I believe men and women see films differently. Most male viewers, albeit feminist at heart, may be unable to access the emotional turmoil of watching a rape scene involving a woman the way a female viewer might. This is because different individuals embody gender very differently in their lived experiences. This disparity is not restricted to *Maharaja*. I have earlier written about how women perceive Selvaraghavan's films — the ones sensitive male reviewers have not found problematic — as being rife with red flags.

When I put my thoughts out on social media platform X, the responses confirmed that the majority of the women got what I was trying to say, and some men did too. The rest chose to insist that I was an attention seeker ranting about a brilliant film that was doing very well, just to rain on its parade.

So, this is my attempt to explain what I felt was wrong with *Maharaja*, a film with a neat script, great performances and staging.

I respect filmmakers and actors who can sell us repetition well, helping peel each layer like an onion. And, in his landmark 50th film, Vijay Sethupathi aces that, like we have seen before in *Naduvula Konjam Pakkatha Kaanom*. He plays a subtle, caring yet silent person, a zone he is a natural in. His is the performance that expresses grief in a half tear that rolls down from one eye.

Nithilan writes well too, but seems overly fond of shock value, and it almost looks like he does not trust his writing to do its work. So he ends up reinforcing it with disturbing visuals or dialogues. To be fair, he creates three female characters with agency — Selvam's wife Kokila, played by the lovely Abhirami, PT teacher Aasifa played by Mamta Mohandas, and Jyothi played by Sachana Namidass. But one among the many instances where Nithilan stumbles, is in the belief that humour can be elicited from everyday violence and custodial beating. This, in a state that has seen very many cases of custodial violence and where the deaths of P Jeyaraj and J Bennix are still raw.

A thief who steals only TVS 50s might bring on the laughs, but not the fact that he's getting repeatedly assaulted on his posterior, with a police officer saying the line: "You won't be able to go to the toilet." Because of how it is placed, the audience laughs.

In another scene, where Inspector Varadarajan, played by Natarajan Subramaniam, makes a thief reenact how he stole valuables, he makes light of the fact that the cupboard keys were kept in one place. How does Nithilan write that scene? The man of the house slaps his wife. The audience laughs. Slow claps.

In the police station, Vijay Sethupathi's Maharaja purportedly waits to get back his iron dustbin Lakshmi, which is said to have saved

his daughter's life. In that long wait, he's slapped countless times by various cops. If the intention was to show how much Maharaja was willing to go through to get back his Lakshmi, it did not land that way. It turned into a 'slap on demand' kind of terrible humour fest.

Now comes the worst part, the sexual violence. This is never an easy sequence to write, shoot, enact, or watch in any context, but the terror should not be exacerbated with screams, grunts, a satiated look on the face of the perpetrator, and definitely not a 'one for the road' third attempt at the crime. You don't need a background score to din the violence. We are surrounded by innumerable cases of sexual violence where the gory details are out, and we get the point, thank you.

This visual language of depicting sexual violence is not restricted to Jyothi's character in the film. In the other plot point too, when two middle-class men steal while getting away, one permits the other to rape, as just a casual thing they do. The utter callousness of all this is shameful, and the attempts to showcase one of the men as a loving husband and father are even worse.

Also, when Jyothi opens her eyes, the first thing she says is that she wants to meet the people who did this to her, and the writer makes her take that long walk to an under-construction site as an emotional ploy... bad writing and staging choice. One of them casually says his wife is not in town. The same character at one stage compares a smooth surface to a young girl's skin. Nauseating, even if the makers can say they did it to drop a hint about the character. Do better.

In recent times, two films that dealt with sexual violence were *Gargi* and *Chiththa*, both miles ahead when it comes to the sensitivity index. *Gargi* director Gautham Ramachandran consulted with actor and co-producer Aishwarya Lekshmi for the writing, because he had shared the script with her many times for feedback. Also, the women on his creative team as well as friends had all been consulted to check if they felt anything was amiss with the treatment.

In the case of *Chiththa*, directed by Arun Kumar and produced by its lead actor Siddharth, the film was shown to top psychiatrists and child psychologists as well as survivors, to ensure there was no misstep. Nothing in those films was for shock value. They were survivor-

sensitive but *Chiththa* was also criticised for aspects like saviour complex, and the treatment of the 'not all men narrative'.

These films documented violence, bringing out the terror and sadness of the experience without heightened sensationalism for claps. They also triggered empathy and encouraged conversation about sex offences.

Finally, what about a rape haunts you? The fact that it is a dehumanising, violent crime, or that it happened to someone close to you? The fact that the film made it about the latter is the biggest slip of all.

What makes us human is empathy, the ability to feel for others. What also makes us responsible citizens is allowing the law to take its course. Films reaffirming vigilante justice set a very poor example. And, they prevent any conversation, just giving people a convenient, pop-corn flavoured conclusion for the sake of it.



Subha J Rao is an entertainment journalist covering Tamil and Kannada cinema and is based out of Mangaluru, Karnataka.

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/flix/opinion-vijay-sethupathi-film-maharaja-is-an-example-of-how-not-to-depict-violence-on-screen>

Hey Filmmakers, It's Time To Pop The Bubble And Hit Hard With Reality

By **Tanya Malik**, *bombaytimes.com*

We have been stuck in our bubbles for way too long, believing that 'one day, it will be a safer world for us women,' but the reality is far from it, and in some ways, cinema is to blame.



We turn on the TV to find a gruesome timeline of a 31-year-old, trainee doctor's horrific rape and murder plastered across every channel. Log onto social media to see posts of unreported rape cases popping up from all corners of the country, only to remind ourselves how nothing's changed since the RG Kar Kolkata tragedy. Suddenly, it hits harder that we've been living in a bubble all this while thinking that one awful incident would finally wake up the nation.

That's the mindset we would have every single time a brutal case hit the headlines. Remember how we thought things might change for women after Nirbhaya? Well, here we are, still stuck in the same rut. That somehow, all daughters will now be protected, bad guys will learn their lesson, and women will be treated as equals. Naive of us, huh?

And guess a lot of us have wondered the same thing: HOW could we be so foolish to believe this country is safe for women? Maybe, just maybe, it has something to do with the content we've been consuming.

Plot Change, Please!

Our silver screens have come a long way in portraying women. Gone are the days of the demure, docile heroine with a 10-inch veil covering her head rolling out rotis in the kitchen. Today, we are all eyeing the confident, ambitious leading ladies who unapologetically chase their dreams. But now when you look at it, you realise, it's all smoke and mirrors. The progressive narratives that leave us teary-eyed are just a shiny bubble that we probably wouldn't like to burst.



We watch these divas strut into the office, looking sharp, coffee in hand, catching the metro in slow-mo making us all crave that kinda life. Nah? Yet we, regular women rushing to work, are only busy making mental calculations every morning: should I avoid the regular coach and head for the ladies' compartment instead? After all, it's safer, with fewer gazes and almost no chance of getting groped. Should I take an auto instead of a cab because girl math says it's easier to jump out of an auto if the driver tries to harass me?

Sure, women are shown shattering glass ceilings at work, winning multiple accolades. But IRL, before they climb those corporate ladders,

we're here only figuring out if it would be safer to get back home with a male colleague at work or if the slit skirt will make us look like we're "asking for it"? Each day begins with a series of tough choices, choices men would only joke about.

Show Us the Mirror, Will You?



Also, on the romance front, can we be real, please? Seeing the leading lady hold hands with her boyfriend, strolling through a breezy evening, sipping hot chai, and munching on *moong dal pakoras*? This whole sequence turns into "how" and "why" moments for us women. Like, seriously, how is a woman out late at night with a guy? Why did she step out after dark? How does she not know a woman in the streets at night, especially with a man, is basically calling for danger?

And then there's the "*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*" narrative. All this talk of education and empowerment, for what? So, women after years of studying, face harassment, violence, and eventually death when they step out to serve the nation?

A lot of catching up at your end, filmmakers, because as audiences, we can no longer buy the unrealistic tales you have been trying to sell all these years. We need reality checks because no hero is going to swoop in and save us from cruelty, no amount of karate moves will keep off those catcalls, and no number of CCTVs at work will give us peace of

mind because we are safe nowhere. If being born a female is a hoax, it should be put out there on screen. As cinema lovers, many of us would rather accept that harsh truth than pretending otherwise.

Or better still, bring us films that mentally prepare us to face the world's harsh realities. You have tried to educate men, sensitise them about women but clearly, we aren't hitting home. If the current story game isn't working, try taking another route, please!



Tanya Malik, Digital Editor with 11 years' experience in print and digital media, champions women's issues through her writing and editing, shaping impactful content and conversations.

<https://www.bombaytimes.com/people/bt-lens/hey-filmmakers-it-s-time-to-pop-the-bubble-and-hit-hard-with-reality/1724155362959>

Reclaiming the Night: A Woman's Journey Through Chennai After Dark (Translated from Tamil)

By *Chithra Rangarajan*, herstories.xyz



"We are not afraid of the night – we are afraid of the way men have made the night their own." – Audre Lorde

The Night That Once Belonged to Women

In the oral traditions of West Africa—across Ghana, Nigeria, and Mali—night was never merely the absence of day. It was a realm unto itself: a space of power, mystery, and transformation. The ‘night-walkers’ moved through darkness with purpose, women whose knowledge of herbs and roots made them guardians of their communities. They collected medicinal plants under moonlight and patrolled village boundaries, protectors cloaked in shadow.

Today's world has rewritten this story. 'Stay home. Stay safe,' we're told, as if darkness itself has changed gender.

Why does sunset shift the rules so dramatically between men and women? Why does night grant men freedom, while offering women only fear and invisible curfews? When someone asks, "Why do you want to go out alone at night?" I want to respond: "Is the moon a lamp lit only for men? Do the street lights not shine for me too?" The night holds a stillness and honesty that daylight rarely permits, yet we're taught to fear it, rather than claim it.

Planning a Revolution, One Bus at a Time

The obstacles began before we even left. Three travel agencies flatly refused our request for an AC bus to transport thirty-five women on a night tour of Chennai. "We can't guarantee your safety," they said, as if safety were something women could only receive, never create. When the fourth agency finally agreed, we laughed at the absurdity. The adventure had already begun.

At Besant Nagar, outside Thalappakatti restaurant, two transgender women sat nearby. When they asked for food, a friend shared the sweet puffed rice balls she'd brought. They were curious about our destination. "On a night walk for women," my friend Geetha explained. Their eyebrows raised. "Aren't you scared?" Geetha calmly replied, "Scared of what?" They smiled broadly, genuine warmth in their voices: "Nice!" It felt like a blessing as we embarked into the night.

For too long, night has been coded as the masculine territory. A truly progressive society—one where women move freely through all hours—remains frustratingly elusive. This same society that restricts women from working or studying after dark can barely comprehend the concept of a recreational 'night walk.' You can almost hear the collective judgment: *This girl needs to be married off quickly!*

Cake by Flash light

At eleven o'clock, we gathered on Elliot's Beach to celebrate a friend's birthday. Phone flash lights illuminated our circle as we cut cake, the joy pure and uncomplicated. The beach's name carried us into

history—Isabella Napier, who walked away from seventeen years of marriage and three children for a passionate romance with Edward Francis Elliot, the Chief Magistrate and Superintendent of Police in colonial Madras. Her choice, controversial and daring, reminded us that women have always been making impossible decisions, rewriting prescribed narratives.

Inside the bus, we introduced ourselves, each sharing what this night walk meant. For some, darkness felt liberating, permission to exist differently. Their words moved several of us to tears. Then someone played '*Nila adhu vaanathu mele*'—*High above, the silver moon glows bright*—and the mood shifted to laughter and dancing, until thirst overtook us.

The Moon, The Sea, and Drunk Men Taking Our Photo

By 11:30 PM, we reached Nochikuppam Loop Road. Above us, the moon. Before us, the sea. The streets glowed with light, and roadside stalls—all run by women—drew us with aromas of masala puffed rice, banana fritters, and ginger tea. We formed a circle on the sand and played 'Ring-a-ring o' roses,' our voices carrying across the beach. Six drunk men nearby, lost in their own evening, seemed annoyed by our exuberance. Undeterred, we asked them to take our group photograph. They obliged, with amusement.

At midnight, we debated politics over hot '*sukku malli kaapi*' for thirty minutes. Why does the night remain inaccessible to women? We invoked Kannagi, the protagonist of the Tamil epic who burned down the kingdom of Madurai to protest injustice. We discussed Dravidian identity and the glaring absence of women's representation in Indian politics. To sit on the beach at midnight, sipping '*kaapi*' and discussing politics as women—my heart swelled with the significance of this simple act.

Nearby, fisher-folk slept on mats on the beach, having abandoned their newly built housing apartments because the tiny spaces couldn't accommodate the heat. My heart ached at the sight. Slowly, we were reclaiming pieces of night that had been systematically denied to us.

Biryani at 3 AM (Apparently This Is Normal)

At 1:15 AM, the bus stopped at the Urban Square beneath the Guindy Kathippara flyover. I clutched my gold bangles nervously, regretting I hadn't left them home, and stepped into a revelation. Families filled the space—children as young as four, elders in their seventies, all queuing up for biryani, burgers, bhel puri, and ice cream. A grandfather fed his granddaughter softly, an image that touched something tender in me. We ate masala sundal standing in the crowd; there were no seats available, in the middle of the night!

Chennai—*Singara Chennai*, beautiful Chennai—revealed itself in ways I'd never witnessed. I wondered aloud how people could digest biryani at this hour. A friend looked genuinely surprised: "Haven't you tried the 3 AM biryani stall before?" Clearly, I'd been living in only half my city.

By 2 AM, chaos awaited outside Buhari restaurant on Mount Road, one of Chennai's oldest establishments. Crowds fought over 'bun-butter-jam'—their specialty—while another surge emerged from the 83-year-old Casino theatre. I stood awestruck, realizing how much of urban life 'happens' while most of us sleep.

Salt, Sweat, and the Economics of Sleep

At 2:45 AM, Kasimedu fish market welcomed us with its salty air, thick with the labour of an entire fishing community. While we sleep in comfort, they work sleeplessly to meet our needs. The realization moved me profoundly. We complain about losing a single night's sleep, yet here was an entire community sacrificing rest every single night.

One vendor cheerfully thrust a kilo of cuttlefish into my hands: "*Mudhal boni*—first purchase is yours! Take it!" The strength of countless fisherwomen overwhelmed me, their resilience woven into the city's infrastructure. Buying fresh fish at dawn prices added unexpected joy to the expedition.

From Fish to Flowers

At 4 AM, our night walk concluded at Koyambedu flower market. My nose shifted from Kasimedu's briny cuttlefish to the perfume of jasmine. Our society wants to honour the women—like 'flowers', like 'lamps of sacrifice', I thought, then couldn't control my internal laughter at the cliché of it all.

Yet the market was genuinely alive: jasmine braids, rose garlands, towering floral arrangements for wedding brides and deities. Vendors woke at 1 AM, trucks carrying flowers from distant towns arrived at 2 AM, and customers would throng by 5 AM.

Among them sat a sixty-year-old woman with a huge vessel of hot *kuzhi paniyarams*—sweet and savory rice balls. She had woken at midnight, cooked them fresh, loaded them onto a cart, and brought them to feed hungry workers. With unmistakable pride, she told us she used her earnings to educate her grandchildren.

That moment captured the essence of what we'd witnessed: a celebration of the working class, often unseen, rarely acknowledged, yet absolutely vital for growth of the city.

The Night Is Ours

This was a night I will never forget. Endless gratitude to Nivedita Louis and Her Stories, who guided us tirelessly, narrating the history each place carried, and gently tapping our backs when exhaustion made us drowsy.

If women wait for the world to make us feel fully safe, many of us will never step out, never grow, and never attempt anything new. Safety is something we must create collectively, not something granted by patriarchal permission.

Even when the world says, 'Stay home. Stay safe,' we must keep moving.

We must reclaim our night.

The moon doesn't belong to men alone. The streets don't belong to men alone. The darkness doesn't belong to men alone.

We are the descendants of night-walkers, of women who moved through shadows with purpose and power. That inheritance is ours to claim—thirty-five women on a bus, eating biryani at 1 AM, debating politics at midnight, buying fish at 3 AM, smelling jasmine at 4 AM.

Dear comrades: the night is calling. Will you answer?



Chithra Rangarajan is a Chennai-based architect, interior designer, bilingual writer, and illustrator. She co-runs a design firm, explores feminist themes, and authored the Tamil literary series “Medhinyin Devadhaigal.”

<https://herstories.xyz/night-ride-chithra/>

V.

Marginalised Genders & Intersectional Struggles

Centring the voices and specific challenges of transgender, queer, and disabled individuals.

To exist, to be recognised, and to belong — these are not givens for many in our society, but hard-won acts of courage. This section centres the voices of transgender, queer, and disabled individuals who continue to claim visibility, dignity, and agency in a world that too often denies them space. Their stories reveal how gender, sexuality, and ability intersect with power — and how resilience takes root even in exclusion. Each narrative is both a mirror and a map: reflecting how the world marginalises difference, and charting new ways of being seen, heard, and respected.

From challenging stereotypes and reclaiming identity, to demanding access, representation, and rights, these voices expand the very idea of equality. They remind us that inclusion is not charity — it is justice. Together, these stories insist that true progress is measured not by who rises within existing systems, but by who finally gets to enter the frame at all.

Fighting for Visibility & Dignity: Amplifying transgender stories and the failure of welfare systems.

1. **Gangadharan B** - The Harrowing Queer Struggle Of Accessing STI Care In India
2. **Vaivab Das** - The Reality of India's Transgender Welfare Boards: What an RTI Investigation Reveals
3. **Satvika Mahajan & Ashna Butani** - Homes for Transgender People: A Safe Space, Threatened

The harrowing queer struggle of accessing STI care in India

By Gangadharan B, *Queerbeat.org*

Stigma and ignorance about the diversity of LGBTQIA+ communities in the Indian medical system continue to exact a hefty toll on LGBTQIA+ folks.



Illustrator - Mia Jose

On a sunny morning in May 2023, I was on my way through the narrow streets of Puducherry to a hospital to get tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for the first time. My head was full of questions. “How will I tell them I had had sex with men? Is it a wise choice to visit the hospital?” The anonymity afforded by the mask I’d worn felt insufficient. I was nervous.

As a bisexual man who’s had multiple sexual partners over the years, I’ve been acutely aware of the heightened risk of contracting an STI. Even though I’ve never had any symptoms, getting tested was on my mind for quite a while. But not having enough confidence to disclose my sexuality to a doctor deterred me – until a friend’s encouragement finally helped me muster up the will.

I entered the sprawling campus of the Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research Institute, colloquially known as JIPMER, a premier public hospital in Puducherry.

Locating the STI clinic was my first challenge. I asked the hospital staff to direct me to one, but they seemed to have no idea what an STI clinic was. I encountered signboards with directions to departments dedicated to all kinds of medical specialisations, but there was no mention of an STI clinic. Later, I discovered that the STI clinic was housed within the dermatology department, something I hadn't even considered.

The afternoon heat had kicked in and I was considering abandoning my quest when I finally managed to find a signboard to a 'screening centre'. Upon my arrival, the guard stationed outside the centre informed me that the screening centre was not intended for outpatients. Instead, he directed me to the outpatient ward.

In the outpatient ward, the receptionist suggested he'd never heard the term 'STI' before. Even after I explicitly mentioned "screening for sexually transmitted diseases," he looked clueless. So, I told him I had to visit a general physician (GP). As I waited in the queue to see the GP, I considered, again, leaving without getting tested.

Men who have sex with men (MSM), a terminology that some groups find problematic, and transgender persons are considered to be at high risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections and diseases according to the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), which recommends that they visit STI clinics four times a year for testing and treatment. However, as I was finding out, accessing these clinics can be an uphill task.

While I was in the queue outside the GP's office, I asked a doctor who was passing by, whether I was in the right place to get an STI test. He told me to go to the screening centre – the same place I had been turned away from. But the GP redirected me to the right place within his building. This time, I found the 'STI testing room' with a signboard outside.

But my anxiety spiked suddenly when I spotted a student from my university outside the adjoining skin speciality room. I worried about

the possibility of him wrongly assuming I had an STI and telling other people on campus about it. I avoided being seen by him, but he did. Thankfully, he didn't react in any way. But my anxiety, like many queer individuals, wasn't baseless.

A 2019 New York Times story outlines the shame and stigma surrounding sexually transmitted infections among both heterosexual and homosexual persons. But for queer persons, this stigma can do more than psychological damage. A 2016 UN report cited stigma being one of the reasons why 1 in 8 HIV positive persons have been denied medical care.

I entered the screening room and took a seat across the table from the counsellor. What followed made me regret considering the STI testing.

The counsellor loudly asked me the reason for my visit. I mumbled a response. I was already scared, seeing that only a thin plastic partition separated this room from the skin clinic my acquaintance was visiting. This violates the Ministry of Health's guidelines on STI-related healthcare, which mandates that a counselling room must have a door in order to ensure patient privacy.

But the counsellor continued at the same volume as he probed about my sexual experiences: "How many people have you had sex with?" "From what age have you been having sex?" "Do your parents know that you have sex with men?" "Do you think your parents will 'accept' you if they know that you have had sex with men?"

I faked some responses to what felt like aggressive and intimidating questions beyond the scope of medical care. The need to protect my privacy in a space that seemed non-confidential outweighed by my duty to be honest to a medical professional. But for the most part, I couldn't say anything and stayed quiet.

Even as his questions made me feel uncomfortable, his advice made me feel downright helpless. "Considering your sexual experiences, your chances of testing negative are very low," he informed me. "But if you test positive, you won't be able to lead a normal life. Even your parents won't support you."

He added, “There is no cure for HIV. You will have to take so many medicines. It is going to cost you a lot. Do you think you can afford them as a student? Even your friends will abandon you if you test positive. Are your parents rich, will they support you?”

At the end of his moral tirade, he had offered little information on safe sex practices or on the STIs for which I was to be tested. At that time, I didn’t even think about raising a complaint. I just wanted to face it and get the test done.

With all the context around queer people like me being stigmatised in healthcare, this treatment was neither unexpected, nor new. The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, found in a 2022 study that in India, 29.3 percent of MSM avoid health care because of stigma and discrimination. Another 2018 study, which surveyed 4179 MSM, found that about 47% of them never took the HIV test, partly because of stigma.

Systemic accountability is crucial for policymakers, government officials, executives, and healthcare administrators to enforce laws, design inclusive public health policies, reform medical curricula, and create non-discriminatory environments for LGBTQIA+ patients, studies show.

So, I contacted Malathi Munisamy, the head of the Department of Dermatology and Sexually Transmitted Diseases at JIPMER. Dr. Malathi apologised and offered a detailed response, in which she wrote that this is the first time the department has received a complaint about discriminatory approach toward gender and sexual minorities but that my allegations are “taken very seriously and that a thorough investigation will be conducted” as the attitudes that I encountered from the counsellor “do not align with JIPMER’s policies.”

Munisamy’s statement acknowledged that although both medical and non-medical staff at the hospital are expected to follow the “guidelines for responding to special groups” specified by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, they are not given any specific training on working with the LGBTQIA+ community.

The heart of medical ignorance

Aqsa Shaikh, professor of community medicine at the Hamdard Institute of Medical Science and Research in New Delhi, said that part of the problem is that the STI and AIDS related trainings given by NACO to medical systems have largely focused on trans people, MSM community and sex workers as high risk groups. “What gets lost in this is other queer identities including bisexual people, trans man and lesbian women, who then bear the brunt of the ignorance of the medical establishment.” Agreeing with Shaikh, L. Ramakrishnan, a public health expert with SAATHI, a Chennai-based non-profit, added that he reviewed about a dozen MBBS textbooks on topics such as STIs, psychiatry, and gynaecology, but found that none provided a nuanced understanding of the LGBTQIA+ community and its needs.

Even as recently as 2021, the Madras High Court observed that medical textbooks contain ‘vast amounts of transphobic and homophobic literature’. The Court directed the National Medical Commission, which is responsible for determining the curriculum for medical education across India, and the Tamil Nadu Medical Council to update the textbooks. “Following this, subjects in psychiatry and forensic medicine have been updated. However, the texts on STIs have still not changed,” added Ramakrishnan.

Like mine, Aishwarya’s experience (name changed on her request to protect her privacy) iterates this need for the medical fraternity to understand diverse queer identities. The 24-year-old writer and filmmaker based in Delhi, who identifies as a bisexual woman, had approached YRG Care in Delhi. YRG Care is an NGO focused on AIDS-related healthcare and STI testing across India.

At the clinic, according to Aishwarya, she was forthcoming about her sexual history with different partners. But instead of being met with medical advice, she said she was probed about her sexuality. She said, “The doctor and nurse struggled to comprehend bisexuality. They asked me whom I prefer more - men or women? And when I explained that it varies, they said they couldn’t understand how one person can like both men and women.”

Furthermore, Aishwarya stated that the doctors themselves made remarks like ‘You seem well-educated, why are you here?’ and even questioned if she was a sex worker.

When I reached out to YRG Care they said they were unable to locate any records of a woman visiting the centre on the specified date. AK Sri Krishnan, Chief Operating Officer, and Subash, Project Lead, at YRG Care clarified that while they do not dispute Aishwaya's claim, they can neither validate nor negate it due to the absence of records. They expressed regret and committed to preventing any such incidents in the future by retraining staff and reinforcing sensitivity awareness throughout their premises.

Ask for care, receive trauma

While JIPMER and YRG Care's statement reflects a willingness for accountability, stigmatising behaviour towards queer individuals can not only restrict access, but also cause lasting damage.

Vignesh Dhananjayan, a final-year medical student at Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan Medical College, Perambalur, Tamil Nadu uses social media to raise awareness and assist queer individuals in accessing HIV-related healthcare like Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). PrEP and PEP are anti-HIV medications that can reduce the chances of getting HIV when exposed to the virus. PrEP should be taken 2 to 24 hours before possible exposure to HIV and PEP can be taken within 72 hours post-exposure.

Vignesh told me that in March 2023, Kishore (name changed to protect his identity), a gay man, reached out to him for help after being allegedly sexually assaulted on a date. According to Vignesh, Kishore tested positive for HIV, so he directed him to the government-run Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) centre in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Vignesh said, "Instead of treating him, the counselors at the ART centre pushed Kishore to the brink of suicide."

I was unable to speak directly with Kishore, as Vignesh mentioned that he is reluctant to engage with journalists. Vignesh said, "Kishore told me that a counsellor at the centre said he deserved the rape and questioned his manhood because he 'wasn't able to stop it [the assault]'", Vignesh continued. "Within one week of this ordeal, Kishore was searching the internet for methods to die [by suicide]. It was a real struggle for me to walk him off the ledge."

When I contacted Sundaresan, a medical officer at the ART centre, they denied the incident, stating that it could not have occurred within their facility. According to Vignesh, Kishore remembers the name of the employee who allegedly made discriminatory remarks as Senthil Kumar, although he is uncertain of his position at the centre. Sundaresan stated that no one named Senthil Kumar was employed there, and suggested that such an event might have occurred at the STI clinic within the same hospital. However, Vignesh responded, “It is the ART centre and not the STI clinic, as confirmed by the victim.”

Vignesh eventually registered a complaint about this incident via email to the director of the Tamil Nadu AIDS Control Society (TANSACS) through email (which queerbeat has received a copy of), but didn’t receive any response.

Who is accountable?

Like Vignesh, queer individuals in India advocate for and await industrial reforms within the healthcare system that paves the way for rightful access to safe healthcare for sexually transmitted infections and diseases. Shaikh believes that the larger accountability lies with the Ministry of Health and the National Medical Commission if we want to ensure that queer people don’t face queerphobic behaviour from the medical fraternity and to create systems-level queer inclusivity in the medical establishment in India.

Ramakrishnan emphasised on the need for collaborative system overhaul with participation from the queer community to help create safer systems. He said, “While many NGOs provide training and sensitivity programs for healthcare workers, reaching every individual is almost impossible. Comprehensive change requires updating textbooks and educational materials across the board. Without these systemic changes, it’s difficult to shift the current situation significantly.”

“HIV-related training in the health centres has been happening since the mid-1990s and more intensively from 2002-2003. But LGBTQIA+ rights movements are very recent, so many doctors who have learned about HIV and STIs don’t make a connection between MSM, transgenders, and the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, the issue of heightened vulnerability to STIs has often operated separately from

the broader LGBTQIA+ activism,” added Ramakrishnan. “Along with the textbook updation, people from the LGBTQIA+ community should also participate during the training programs for healthcare workers.”

But even while the queer community makes moves towards greater awareness of sexual health in India, a tacit question lingers in queer bodies—who will heal the wounds created in the process of trying to heal from diseases?



Gangadharan B is a journalist working with Citizen Matters, covering civic, environmental, gender, and climate issues. He's part of CNN Academy's Global South Cohort and has been recognised for his work on queer and human rights stories.

<https://www.queerbeat.org/stories/the-harrowing-queer-struggle-of-accessing-sti-care-in-india>

The Reality of India's Transgender Welfare Boards: What an RTI Investigation Reveals

By **Vaivab Das**, thewire.in

This investigation through RTIs, first-hand narratives from various transgender welfare board members, trans/queer rights activists, and judicial observations, reveals compelling reasons for India to shift away from nominal representations, and demand transformative reforms.



Pride flags in the Kerala town of Aluva. The image has been edited by putting under a filter. Photo: Flickr/Kandukuru Nagarjun (Attribution 2.0 Generic)

In his speech on the last day of the Budget Session of the 17th Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked: “Those who are on the margins have been reassured that there is a government.” These margins remind us of the “Lakshman Rekha” or circle of protection, and in turn of the predicament of Sita, in the Hindu

mythological epic Ramayana. Sita was asked to trust the protection of men against the violence of other men. But for transgender persons in India, neither side of the margin seems to offer a dignified life.

On one hand, 19 states and Union Territories across India still don't have a welfare body for transgender persons, as legally stipulated. Of these, four are UTs controlled by the Union government, and eight states have the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the party in power or as an alliance partner in the government. The 17 states and UTs that do have a welfare board for trans persons are mostly running rudderless without a policy framework, compliance mechanism, or any power.

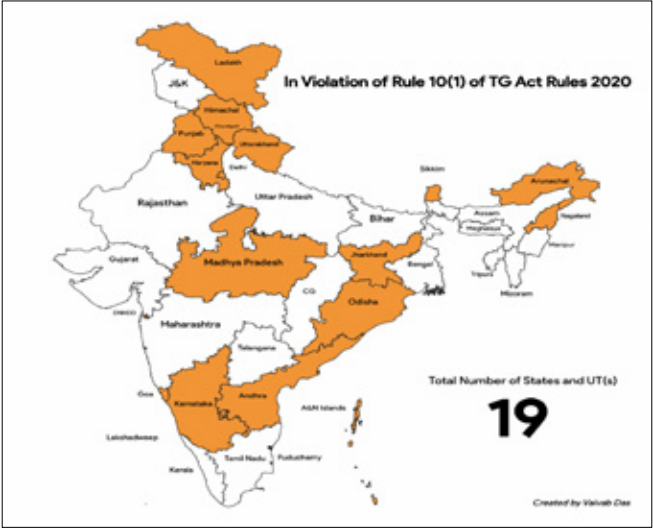
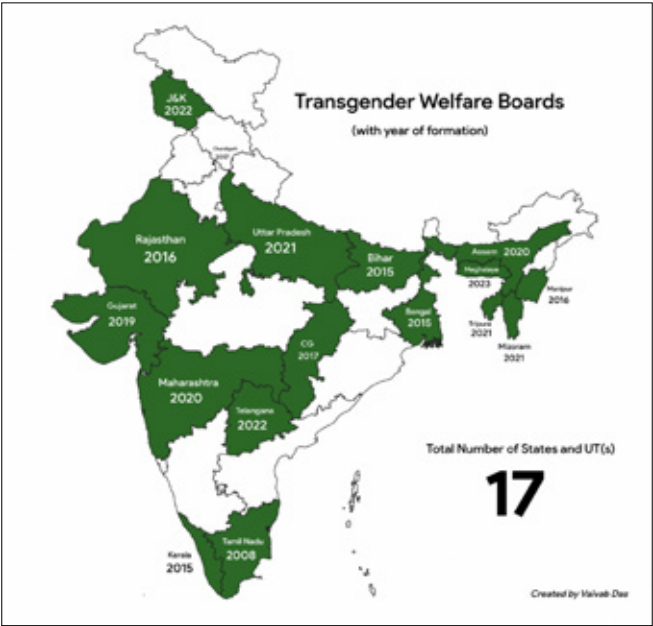
These non-transparent, non-accountable and in some cases, non-existent bureaucratic bodies are turning into phantom forums that act as a countermeasure to diffuse people's movements that rise to hold governments accountable to their legislative promises.

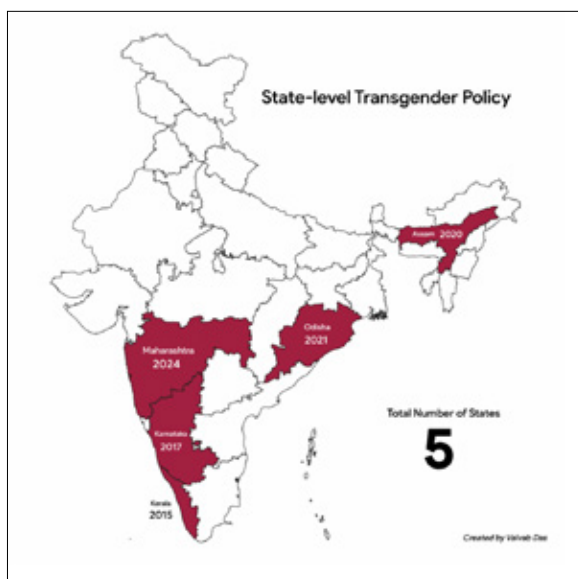
On the other hand, only 5.6% of transgender persons (as per the 2011 census) in the country have applied for a transgender identity card — revealing the inaccessible nature of identity card application and the futility of such a document for a marginalised transgender person when the state doesn't actually provide rights or welfare measures that benefit them.

This investigation through RTIs, first-hand narratives from various transgender welfare board members, trans/queer rights activists, and judicial observations, reveals compelling reasons for India to shift away from its tendency to celebrate nominal representations, and demand transformative reforms to right the historical wrongs carried out against transgender and gender non-conforming persons.

Boards exist, but only on paper Rule 10(1) of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2020 which states, "The appropriate Government shall constitute a welfare board for the transgender persons for the purpose of protecting their rights and interests of, and facilitating access to schemes and welfare measures framed by the Government.". Presently, 17 states and Union Territories have notified a Transgender Welfare/Justice/Development board under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 and rules 2020. This includes Assam,

Bihar, Chandigarh, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.





We took a closer look at these notified boards, and this is what we found. The majority of the states which have notified a transgender welfare board have held less than one meeting per year since their creation. The functioning of welfare boards in Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Manipur and Tripura remains undisclosed till today. Gujarat had notified a transgender welfare board in 2019 in collaboration with UNAIDS. According to its members, the board did not hold a single meeting until October 14 this year – five years after the board was formed. Of the remaining 12 states and UTs, only four held meetings in 2023 – namely, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Chandigarh, and Maharashtra.

In Mizoram not a single meeting of the board has been convened since its creation.

In states like Manipur, since 2017, the welfare board remains practically defunct. Last year, the Governor of Manipur reconstituted the 17-member board with only one transgender woman and one transgender man represented in the body.

This year, Punjab and Haryana high court in a PIL filed by Yashika, a transgender student, observed that the Chandigarh Transgender Welfare Board has been acting as a cosmetic feature for the government and did not meet sufficiently to discharge its duties.

The Amicus Curiae (an impartial adviser to a court of law), appointed by the Kerala high court in *Kabeer v. State of Kerala* 2021, noted in their report that the Kerala State Transgender Justice Board had not convened a single meeting in the reported year.

The National Council for Transgender Persons constituted under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has just held two meetings in the last four years since its creation.

State/UT	Year of Board Formation	Total Number of Meetings	Meetings held in 2023	Average Meetings (per year)
Tamil Nadu	2008	28*	3	1.8*
Kerala	2015	6	1	0.7
West Bengal	2015	7*	0	0.8*
Bihar	2015	3	0	0.3
Rajasthan	2016	3	0	0.4
Manipur	2016	2*	0	0.3*
Chandigarh	2017	11	3	1.6
Gujarat	2019	1	0	0.2
Assam	2020	3	0	0.8
Maharashtra	2020	3	3	0.8
Uttar Pradesh	2021	2	0	0.7
Mizoram	2021	0	0	0
Telangana	2022	1	0	0.5
Meghalaya	2023	7	0	7
Centre	2020	2	0	0.5
Chattisgarh	2017	No Data	No Data	No Data
Tripura	2021	No Data	No Data	No Data
Jammu & Kashmir	2022	No Data	No Data	No Data

Source: RTI(s) and board members.

Note: Approximate numbers of meetings estimated from statements given by various welfare board members.

Only five states have developed a state-level transgender policy, namely, Kerala, Karnataka, Assam, Odisha, and Maharashtra. Assam is the only state in India which has extended quasi-judicial powers to its welfare board. It is a form of delegated authority to ensure compliance with its recommendations under various provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019.

These boards are also not immune to political abandonment when there is a change of ruling party in the state. For instance, the Maharashtra transgender welfare board was a brainchild of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) – an alliance of the Shiv Sena (Uddhav faction), NCP (Sharad Pawar faction) and Congress – and was allocated Rs 5 crore in the 2020 Maharashtra Budget. In 2022, when the MVA government was dislodged from power by the Mahayuti alliance of the BJP, Shiv Sena (Shinde faction), and NCP (Ajit Pawar faction), no subsequent budgetary allocations were made for the welfare of transgender communities in the following fiscal years.

The trips and traps of representation

In 2014, in the NALSA vs Union of India case, the Supreme Court of India accorded constitutional recognition to a transgender person's right to self identity their gender, and judicial directives were given to appropriate governments (Union and state) to assist their lives. In 2019, the parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (TG Act), which envisioned a two-pronged approach to reach out to transgender persons – an inclusive approach by formulating a transgender identity card to 'quantify' what transness means for the state; and a convergent approach by constituting a nodal body (the welfare board) as a forum comprising of transgender persons and bureaucrats from various in-line ministries/departments at the Union or state level. This nodal body has to protect the rights and interests of transgender persons and facilitate their access to schemes and welfare measures framed by the government. Both these approaches are riddled with flaws.

Representation of transgender persons in the governance apparatus constructed around the TG Act has two issues – the trip and the trap.

First, the government of India, like British colonisers, lumped various indigenous and gender non-conforming identities under the single label of “transgender”. This oversimplifies the diversity of gender-nonconforming experiences and identities in India.

In states where boards do exist, it is trans women who have had gender affirmation surgeries who are represented most. Trans men, non-binary persons, and intersex persons barely get a seat. Ani Dutta, a professor at the University of Iowa, in their research, notes the tendency of the Indian bureaucracy to create complicated regulatory rules around judiciary ordained recognitions. In the context of India’s stark socio-economic disparity, only those with resources, community networks, and relative social privilege can navigate these bureaucratic processes to get a transgender identity card.

There are intricate social divisions within the transgender communities. Trans women who have undergone gender affirmation surgeries enjoy a higher social status than trans women who have not undergone nirvana (ritualised castration) or gender affirmation surgeries. This understanding of gender “authenticity” is implicitly replicated in the TG Act Rules 2020. Section 6 and Section 7 create two class groups – Section 6 enables someone to self-identify as transgender but Section 7 adds a condition to the principle of self-identification that requires medical intervention to identify as a man or woman.

This classification undermines the spectrum of gender fluidity endemic to India.

Trans women who can undergo nirvana or gender affirmation surgeries and identify as “female” are the most dominant, visible and debated narrative of India’s story on the principle of self-identification. The predicament of kothis (a term used for trans women who have not had gender affirmation surgeries, and for gay or bisexual men in some contexts), trans men, intersex persons and genderqueer persons, remain sidelined. It is why the possession of a government-issued transgender ID card under its current provisions is becoming a “representation (power) trip” for some on the margins of our society.

For instance, in 2023, when the Hyderabad North Zone police arrested 19 transgender women, “the community mobilisation to

resist these illegal arrests was impeded by discussions on how ‘men dress up as a transgender persons’ to run begging rackets in the city and bring a bad name to the trans community,” a genderqueer activist (who prefers to be unnamed) privy to discussions on a trans-queer forum says. In the backdrop of this “authentic us versus imposter them” politics, 19 gender nonconforming persons were stripped naked by the police to examine their genitals. There is also little diversity in who gets represented in welfare boards, where they are constituted. Kanmani Ray, a lawyer and a transgender woman, says, “Not all transgender persons live in gharanas/jamaats, not all transgender persons can separate from their natal families, forms of violence experienced by transgender persons are different. What we see in welfare boards is that intersex persons and trans men are sidelined in discussions. Like any other marginalised social group, we face intra-community violence and unequal power relations.” The bureaucracy of welfare boards ignores these realities.

The fact that these boards have transgender persons in them is a “representation trap” – they offer public visibility to marginalised persons but also make them appear politically complicit in the government’s apathy. While trans and gender non-conforming persons look up to the members of the welfare boards to effect change in their material conditions, the representatives themselves have little power to change policy – or even call meetings, as is evidenced by the number of sittings of these boards in most states and UTs.

In 2023, when a group of transgender members of the Telangana Transgender Welfare Board wrote to the Additional Director General of Telangana Police seeking action against a gang of men who were routinely robbing and assaulting trans persons across Hyderabad. The police department ignored these petitions, according to activists. The members of the welfare board could do little as the body has no quasi judicial powers to investigate the issue or take any action — unlike the national and state human rights commissions, women’s commissions, and child welfare bodies. Vyjayanti Vasanta Mogli, an RTI activist, says, “My nominated tenure to the transgender welfare board of my state started and ended without the nodal ministry or its officials outlining the policy framework and power of the board.”

The truth about trans ‘rights’

In the 10 years since the NALSA judgement, the needle of social equality hasn't moved in the “rights” direction in India. This truth is most apparent in the returning figure of a trans person to the judicial corridors to plead for promised but undelivered rights. Sangama and Nisha Guler, on behalf of Jeeva – an organisation working for the upliftment of transgender persons – had to file a PIL with the Karnataka high court in 2020 for horizontal reservation for trans persons in public employment opportunities.

In 2021, Vyjayanti Vasanta Mogli and others in Telangana had to knock on the Telangana High Court's doors for life-supporting amenities during COVID-19. Kantaro Kondagiri had to petition the Orissa high court in 2022 to seek a trans woman's right to inherit the pension of a parent, which in law is made available to the unmarried daughters of any deceased pensioner. Zena Sagar, a Dalit transgender student of the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute had to move to the Calcutta high court in 2023 after being denied hostel accommodation because of her gender identity. Transgender persons struggling for livelihood and resources are still viewed as a public nuisance by the state.

Earlier this year, the Pune police commissioner Amitesh Kumar imposed a begging ban against transgender persons in the city – with absolute disregard to the 2021 advisory circular issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs which said that obstructing a transgender person's access to public space would be a violation of section 18 of the TG Act. Contrary to PM Modi's resounding claim that the government has given transgender persons an identity, the latest data from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment confirm only 5.6% of the enumerated transgender persons in 2011 have applied for a TG identity card.

Why would trans and gender non-conforming persons enlist themselves on the state's registers without the Indian government proactively working on various dimensions of citizenship like equal and dignified access to family, property, housing, healthcare, social security, education, and employment? A cursory look at the Union government's budget allocations and

actual expenditure on trans welfare explains why transgender persons continue to exist on the margins in a welfare-centric polity like India. In 2021-22, the government allocated Rs 20 crore for the Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons – however, only Rs 1.91 crore was spent. In 2022-23, the allocation increased to Rs 30 crore, but the actual amount spent was only 0.4% of this allocation – a paltry Rs 12 lakh.

Budget Head	Fiscal Year	Budget Estimates	Revised Budget	Actual Expenditure	Utilisation Rate
Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons	FY 2021-22	20 Cr	20 Cr	1.91 Cr	9.55%
	FY 2022-23	30 Cr	30 Cr	0.12 Cr	0.40%
	FY 2023-24	52.91 Cr	22.82 Cr	TBD	TBD

Source: Union Budget 2024.

During the last interim budget presentation, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman claimed that providing more people access to existing government welfare schemes is the welfare story of PM Modi’s ten years of governance. However, the exclusion of transgender persons from the Gender Budget Statement and the systematic refusal to mainstream their access to government programmes and schemes beyond the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment shred these high claims. Raghavi, a lawyer and trans rights activist from Delhi, says, “The insufficient investment in gender-inclusive infrastructure across public institutions and scattered sensitisation programmes for various in-line departments discredits the government’s much-touted saturation-approach.”

Reform or reimagine?

The reform sought by trans activists we spoke to has three urgent demands – power redistribution, inclusive representation and decentralisation.

Grace Banu, a Dalit trans rights activist from Tamil Nadu, points out a fundamental flaw in the design of transgender welfare boards: “The majority of decision-makers on the boards are cisgender men or women, the staff aiding the functioning of these boards are cisgender. Transgender persons are a nominated minority in the composition of a board constituted in their name.” Vyjayanti adds, “The design of the transgender welfare board does not meaningfully redistribute power to transgender persons, who hold representation on these boards. The power to convene a meeting rests with a bureaucrat, the power to publish the deliberations of these meetings remains with the nodal ministry/department, and the implementation of actionable points remains dependent on the goodwill of various department officials.”

The nominal representation of trans persons on the board without any power makes them a rubber duck to face pushback from trans-queer communities on the government’s inaction. “We get a seat, not say,” remarks Vyjayanti.

Rituparna Neog, associate vice chairperson of the Assam Transgender Welfare Board, explains the material limitations of these boards. “The lack of annual allocation of funds for the functioning of the welfare board impairs the ability of its transgender members to intervene in any emergency situations related to the community.” The notion that social work is a self-financed undertaking restricts the participation of working-class and unemployed community organisers in these nominated roles. No welfare board in India offers its members a nominal salary to carry out the board’s work. Except for Tamil Nadu, various welfare boards in India do not even provide travel allowance to their transgender members to attend board meetings.

Grace, Vyjayanti, and Rituparna agree on the fact that most welfare boards do not have prescribed policy guidelines for their nominated members to push for an actionable agenda, nor are these bodies accorded quasi-judicial authority like various human or women’s rights commissions to enforce compliance. These boards need to be converted into statutory independent commissions with legal permits to oversee compliance with the government agenda, and take cognisance of human rights violations being committed against trans and gender non-conforming persons within their administrative jurisdiction.

Regarding inclusive representation, Arun Karthik (he/him), a member of the Tamil Nadu Transgender Welfare Board and a trans man, explains the structural inequality within these representative boards. “Currently in Tamil Nadu whenever a trans man wants to report an incident in the TG welfare board meetings, other members (bureaucrats and trans women) do not provide them equal space or attention,” he says.

He adds, “The schemes and benefits being provided by the Tamil Nadu government are disproportionately offered to trans women. Till 2023, the Government Orders (GO) released by the Social Welfare Department of Tamil Nadu (the nodal body for the Transgender Welfare Board) used to only mention the term Thirunangai (the Tamil word for transgender women) as beneficiaries. It was a term popularised by the former chief minister of Tamil Nadu, the late K. Karunanidhi, for trans women in the state. The government officials repeatedly reject the applications of trans men under these schemes as these circulars do not mention the term ‘trans man’ or thirunambi (nambi denotes man).” It is a telling reality of the popular imagination that remains hinged on the idea that transgender means trans women.

Further, there is a need for decentralisation. Tashi Choedup, a trans-feminine Buddhist monastic and a nominated member of the Telangana Transgender Welfare Board, suggests, “The government needs to decentralise its work of actualising trans rights. Local transgender persons, with a more situated awareness of local politics and conditions, need to be involved and employed at a district level to enable the transfer of welfare schemes and opportunities to transgender constituents.” Don Hasar, a trans/queer rights activist and community organiser from Himachal Pradesh says, “I live in a mountainous terrain, where even to beg the government to enact the provisions of the TG Act or access the TG ID card, is a time-consuming and expensive ordeal. One has to travel eight hours from the mountains to the valley to furnish a representation to the designated department and further wait for a bureaucrat to entertain our query. For a lot of unemployed and working-class trans persons, it is not feasible in terms of time, money and access.”

There is a constitutional urgency to these demands. However, the entire framework of transgender welfare boards carries one caveat with no easy answers. The welfare boards – which presently act in an advisory capacity – have transgender persons as members who are appointed by the government, rather than elected through any democratic means or communitarian consensus. Thus, it becomes difficult to ascertain whether one privileges the government's will which appoints them, or the community with which they share their identity.

Moreover, the consensus across the political aisle on restricting transgender and gender non-conforming persons' direct access to the power of law-making and limiting it to welfare boards is symptomatic of India's pervasive transphobia and the reluctance of various governments and political parties to invest in changing prevailing social attitudes among its population.



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<https://thewire.in/government/the-reality-of-indias-transgender-welfare-boards-what-an-rti-investigation-reveals>

Homes for Transgender People | A Safe Space, Threatened

By **Satvika Mahajan & Ashna Butani**, *The Hindu*

Trigger warning: mentions of suicide and abuse.

Three years ago, the Central government gave the go-ahead for 12 pilot shelter homes across the country for transgender people. Now, facing a fund crunch, Garima Grehs are struggling to keep their doors open. Despite that and the community's many losses, Ashna Butani and Satvika Mahajan finds love, pride, and hope in the home in Delhi

Wearing ornate self-stitched skirts and colourful crop tops, five transwomen lock their Garima Greh and head to Dabri Mor metro station, Janakpuri, in working-class west Delhi on November 24. From here, they will take a train to Barakhamba Road, 16 stops away, to join the city's Queer Pride parade, held since 2008. Their floral tiaras, colourful hair clips, and a headband with the devil's horns don't attract as much attention as they would have a decade ago.

For Anu, who is going to the parade for the first time, the trauma of running away from Haryana in search of a safe space is still fresh. But today, the excitement of being with her friends and an unexpected "Are you all going for Pride? Me too!" from a fellow metro passenger in the women's compartment trumps all other emotions.

On reaching the venue, the transwomen hug their friends who are already there and blend into a sea of rainbows. They pose for selfies, make reels, and prepare for an after-party. For the past few years, Garima Greh, a Central government-funded shelter home for transpeople, has offered a roof, food, medicines, recreation, counselling, and a sense of camaraderie. Each year, transwomen display their make-up artistry for Pride, a skill they learn from workshops in the Garima Greh, where vocational training is part of the government's employment facilitation thrust.

The event was attended by over 1,000 people. Geetanjali, 26, a resident of the home for the past few months, was attending her first Pride along with her partner and best friend, both of whom she met

at the home. “Coming here from a village in Haryana, where only my elder sister accepted me, was like getting a new lease of life. I found a happier version of myself as the community in the Garima Greh allowed me to be the person I wanted to be and not the person I was expected to be,” she says. Samyra, 24, says excitedly, “I got to dress up and hold my head high with my community.” Away from the celebration of belonging to a larger community, the five transwomen are oblivious to the threat that looms.

A struggle against the odds

Rudrani Chettri, the Garima Greh project director in Delhi, is worried that the home may have to shut down soon for its 25 residents if funds do not come through. “I have been managing by taking loans from here and there; I get them only because people trust me. But I do not know how much longer we can sustain this way,” she says.

In November 2021, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment said in a press release that it had initiated 12 pilot shelter homes or Garima Grehs for transgender people and provided financial assistance to community-based organisations for setting them up. The Centre has the SMILE (Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise) scheme. This includes a sub-scheme, the Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Welfare of Transgender Persons, of which a component is the setting up of shelter homes. The idea was to run the pilot and progress to establishing at least one in each State.

According to SMILE guidelines, each Garima Greh is to house 25 transgender people and have 12 staff members, including a counsellor, cook, manager, and director. However, the 12 existing homes are facing the threat of shutting down as funds from the government have stopped. Nine project directors from across States that The Hindu spoke to say that they do not know how much longer they can source funds on their own. Many staffers have left or are ready to leave, there is no money for rent, rations, or other necessities, but they keep going because these homes are the only safe spaces for many transgender youth. According to the Ministry, the funds are on hold due to issues with documentation.

Finding Home

When Shreya (name changed to protect privacy), 18, came out to her family as a transwoman, they locked her in a room for a month, opening the door only to give meals. “They burnt all my identity cards and I had nowhere to go. I turned to a Kinnar community (a group of intersex people) in Rajasthan, with whom I was begging for some time,” she says. Earlier in November, she had headed to Delhi in the hope of a new life.

Growing up, even as her ideas about identity were in flux, the dream of becoming a model was constant. “I tried another Garima Greh in Jaipur, but it was full. I came to Delhi after a friend told me about this shelter home,” she says, relieved to have finally found a place she can call home.

For Ritika, 23, reaching the shelter home was eye-opening: “Earlier, I was confused about my identity, but once I came here, I found a family, started speaking to others like me, and understood more about myself.”

In the Capital’s lone Garima Greh, each step across its three floors is painted in the colours of the rainbow. The ground floor, which is used to host workshops and skill development sessions, is covered in artwork by past and current residents. A section of the floor is partitioned into private rooms meant for counselling sessions, which are a mandated part of the Garima Greh’s guidelines set by the Ministry.

For Roshan, 25, the counselling sessions have been life-saving. Having run away from Chhattisgarh over two years ago after being beaten up by his older brother and receiving little support from his parents, Roshan had attempted suicide.

This is his second stint here. “I had very little money and was broken physically and mentally when I came to the house for the first time after an older woman from the community found me begging for food at a railway station in Delhi. If not for her or the house, I would have ended things a long time ago. Now, things are looking up,” he says. Roshan now has access to hormones through the referral system of the home.

On paper vs in reality

In the administrative section of the shelter home, separated from the living quarters by a rainbow-coloured curtain, Rohit, seated behind a computer, says the last funds came in March 2023. The funds — ₹36,46,500 in all — are disbursed in three tranches through the year.

Chettri says when they were looking to rent a place in 2021, homeowners would shut the door on them. Eventually, they found this spot in Sitapuri. While there is acceptance from the people around now, it is far from smooth sailing. “We were given a skeletal framework. But to run it, we need flesh, blood, and veins,” she says.

Over calls with the Ministry, they have been told that their paperwork is not complete.

Project directors in other States have similar experiences. Ranjita Sinha, who runs one of the two homes in West Bengal’s capital Kolkata, had to put up gold jewellery passed on to her from her mother as collateral on a loan.

“I have mailed the Ministry over 100 times, even bought my own ticket to Delhi to go and meet them, but it has all fallen on deaf ears. We were removed from our original home after the landlord took us to court because we had no money for rent. And now my staffers have also threatened to damage our home if salaries are not paid on time,” she says.

Taking such matters to the police is difficult as they don’t take complaints from transpeople seriously. In 2022, a video released by the Mitr Trust that works towards the welfare of LGBTQIA+ people allegedly showed the police picking up residents of the Delhi home, assaulting them, and making lewd remarks.

She adds that there was an inspection by Central government officials in October and they are hopeful that funding will come soon. The Delhi home, too, had an inspection in July. Out of the nine shelter homes that The Hindu spoke to, Sinha’s was the only one that received some funds ahead of Durga Puja this year.

Others have complained that their homes are surviving mostly on loans and goodwill of the people in the community. Puspa Mai in Jaipur says they have exhausted most of the friendly donors who have helped them over the last 20 months. “After imposing so many restrictions on us on how the home is to be run, they are not giving us funds. It would have been better for us to survive through private funding on our own terms.”

One of the restrictions is that each home must have a total built-up space of 3,000 square feet, with specifications for each room, including a kitchen with an attached storeroom.

The home in Thane, Maharashtra, is surviving on loans. Neeta Kene, the project director, says, “There have been issues while uploading our documents on the portal. The Ministry has told us that they will meet us soon and sort the issue out, but we are tired of waiting.”

The Garima Grehs in Chhattisgarh’s Raipur and Odisha’s Bhubaneswar also say they are not getting payment and the staff members are gradually leaving. The Garima Grehs are also supposed to identify training institutes for skill development; skills include catering, tailoring, artificial jewellery making, and driving. With a fund crunch, these efforts are also suffering.

There was no reply from the Ministry to queries from The Hindu.

Surviving the world

The homes continue to thrive as the community members put their heart and soul into building a safe space. The days still begin and end on a positive note, punctuated with activities such as make-up classes from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., and book reading from 11 a.m. to 12 noon.

Survival in the world for many transpeople is a battle. While the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 prohibits discrimination against transpeople in areas such as employment, education, health care, access to public facilities, and housing, the on-ground reality is different. Many are still unable to get access to TG

cards, with reasons ranging from missing or lost documents to a lack of sensitivity among officials.

For many, the homes are the only solace they have as employment, education, and housing are still difficult to access due to stigmatisation. Many of the homes receive more than 25 applications a year, but have to turn people away.

Chettri says since they cannot take everyone in, they help them in other capacities such as securing jobs and scholarships. “This is the least we can do. All they are asking for is equal rights and dignity to live and work,” she says.

(If you are a transperson and need mental health support, please reach out to the Naz Foundation at +91 8800329176, 011-47504630; or Humsafar Trust at +91 9892940966.)

I am a New Delhi-based reporter, currently with The Hindu, covering politics and civic issues. I started my career as a reporter with Millennium Post in 2021 and worked on stories related to education, the impact of COVID-19 on governance in the National capital, and policy formation impacting the environment and infrastructure.

Following my time at Millennium Post, I joined The Hindu in 2023, focusing on governance, policy, and larger issues in Delhi. I have extensively written on Delhi politics, closely covering the 2024 Lok Sabha and 2025 Delhi Vidhan Sabha polls. During the polls, I interviewed various candidates and also wrote in-depth about voter concerns, trends, and other aspects of the elections. I wrote extensively about voter deletion trends in Delhi during the Assembly polls, bringing attention to citizens whose names had been struck off the voter list without notification after their homes were demolished in New Delhi.

Other than politics, I have reported environmental and governance stories—such as coverage of civic infrastructure, pollution control, municipal affairs, and policy. I have reported on stories related to

policy impact on the ground in my stories, such as the impact of the PMSvanidhi Scheme on Street Vendors who are often treated with no dignity by authorities. I have written about the larger impact of demolition drives and the resettlement of citizens in various stories.



Satvika Mahajan joined The Hindu in June 2023 as a correspondent, reporting extensively on Delhi politics, governance, and policy. She covered the 2024 Lok Sabha and 2025 Delhi Vidhan Sabha polls, focusing on voter issues and civic matters. Her work also includes environmental, municipal, and policy impact stories.



Ashna is currently a reporter with The Hindu, where she reports on education, gender, health and their intersections.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/homes-for-transgender-people-a-safe-space-threatened/article68924408.ece>

VI.

Patriarchy, Power & Political Discourse

Analysing the deep-seated structures of patriarchy and their manifestation in politics, media, and public life.

Patriarchy isn't just a mindset — it's a machine. It runs through our politics and media, our laws and living rooms, deciding who leads, who labours, and who gets erased. This section brings together stories that strip patriarchy of its invisibility, exposing how power, prejudice, and silence keep it alive — and how women and marginalised voices are breaking that circuit.

The Architecture of Oppression finds bias even in organ donation (Chandrabhan Yadav). Hate, Harassment & Silenced Voices exposes the enforced silence within Bengal's film world (Varsha Sriram & Madhushree Goswami). And in Democracy Under Siege, Rahee Shruti Ganesh shows how misogyny fuels majoritarianism, questioning who gets to speak while others, like Umar Khalid, face years in prison without trial—an injustice that reverberates, trapping their partners in a parallel struggle.

Collectively, these journalistic pieces show patriarchy for what it is: not a relic of the past, but a living system that still scripts our present — one that demands not reform, but reckoning.

The Architecture of Oppression: Critiquing patriarchy and its economic costs.

1. **Chandrabhan Yadav** - महिलाओं को अंगदान करने से परहेज करते हैं पुरुष

Hate, Harassment & Silenced Voices: Exposing systemic misogyny and power abuse.

1. **Varsha Sriram & Madhushree Goswami** - 'Then Don't Do Films': How Women Actors in the Bengali Film Industry Are 'Silenced'

Democracy Under Siege: Challenging communal hatred and affirming secular ideals.

1. **Rahee Shruti Ganesh** - The Gulmohar that Blossoms in Bitterness (Translated from Marathi)

अंगदान में महिलाएं पुरुषों से आगे : दाताओं में पहले नंबर पर पत्नी, दूसरे स्थान पर मां

By Chandrabhan Yadav, Amar Ujala

पुरुषों को किडनी दान करने वालों में 90 फीसदी महिलाएं हैं, जबकि सिर्फ 10 फीसदी महिला मरीजों का किडनी प्रत्यारोपण हो रहा है। अंगदान करने वाली महिलाओं में पत्नियां सबसे आगे रहती हैं, तो दूसरे नंबर पर मरीजों की मां का स्थान आता है।

हर क्षेत्र में अपनी प्रतिभा व क्षमता का लोह मनवाने वाली महिलाओं ने दूसरों को अंगदान करने में भी पुरुषों को काफी पीछे छोड़ दिया है। अंग प्रत्यारोपण के आंकड़े इसकी गवाही दे रहे हैं। आंकड़े बताते हैं कि पुरुषों को किडनी दान करने वालों में 90 फीसदी महिलाएं हैं, जबकि सिर्फ 10 फीसदी महिला मरीजों का किडनी प्रत्यारोपण हो रहा है। अंगदान करने वाली महिलाओं में पत्नियां सबसे आगे रहती हैं, तो दूसरे नंबर पर मरीजों की मां का स्थान आता है। वहीं पुरुषों में अंगदान के लिए आगे आने की झिझक के पीछे चिकित्सा विशेषज्ञ सामाजिक सोच को दोष देते हैं।

लखनऊ। --

प्रदेश में केजीएमयू में लिवर प्रत्यारोपण और एसजीपीजीआई, लोहिया संस्थान एवं कॉर्पोरेट अस्पतालों में किडनी प्रत्यारोपण हो रहा है। केजीएमयू में अब तक हुए 12 लिवर प्रत्यारोपण के सभी मरीज पुरुष हैं। इनमें से दो को कैडवर (ब्रेनडेड मरीज से लिया गया) से लिवर मिला है। जबकि अन्य मरीजों में 50 फीसदी को पत्नी से और बाकी 50 फीसदी को भाई, बेटा व दूसरे रिश्तेदारों से मिला है। इसी तरह एसजीपीजीआई में हुए करीब 3,135 किडनी ट्रांसप्लांट में 80 फीसदी को पत्नी, मां, बेटा, बहन व दादी ने अंगदान किया है। अन्य को दूसरे रिश्तेदारों ने। यहां 12 फीसदी महिलाओं को ही किडनी मिली है। लोहिया संस्थान में हुए 100 किडनी प्रत्यारोपण में 80 फीसदी मरीजों को पत्नी, मां व बहन से किडनी मिली है। यहां महिलाओं को आठ फीसदी किडनी मिली है। इन्हें किडनी देने वालों में 50 फीसदी मां हैं। सिर्फ एक मरीज को पति ने किडनी दान किया है।

कॉर्पोरेट अस्पतालों में पुरुषों का ही प्रत्यारोपण

लखनऊ के कॉर्पोरेट अस्पतालों में करीब 200 लोगों का किडनी प्रत्यारोपण हुआ है। इसमें 98 फीसदी पुरुष मरीज हैं। इन्हें किडनी दान करने वालों में मां व पत्नी की संख्या 80 फीसदी से अधिक है।

लिवर के मरीज में पुरुष ज्यादा

लिवर खराब होने की बड़ी वजह शराब, तंबाकू आदि है। इस वजह से लिवर के ज्यादातर मरीज पुरुष ही होते हैं। लेकिन अंगदान में महिलाओं की संख्या अधिक है। इसके पीछे मूल कारण सामाजिक सोच हैं।

- डॉ. अभिजीत चंद्रा, विभागाध्यक्ष गैस्ट्रो सर्जरी, केजीएमयू

मां-पत्नी तुरंत आती हैं आगे

किडनी की बीमारी महिला व पुरुष दोनों को बराबर होती है। शिक्षा का स्तर बढ़ रहा है, लेकिन अंगदान से पुरुष कतराते हैं। इसके लिए सामाजिक जागरूकता की जरूरत है। पत्नी या मां तत्काल दान के लिए आगे आती है, जबकि पुरुष सोच विचार में पड़ा रहता है।

- डॉ. नारायण प्रसाद, विभागाध्यक्ष नेफ्रोलॉजी, एसजीपीजीआई

पुरुष कतराते हैं

बच्चे के जन्म देने के बाद महिलाओं में कुछ इम्यूनोलॉजिकल बदलाव होते हैं। कुछ मामलों में पति की किडनी मैच करने में समस्या आती है, लेकिन बड़ी वजह सामाजिक है। पितृ सत्तात्मक समाज होने की वजह से पुरुष अंगदान करने से कतराते हैं।

- डॉ. नम्रता राव, नेफ्रोलॉजी विभाग, लोहिया संस्थान

सामाजिक संकट-

अंगदान में महिलाओं की भागीदारी 87 फीसदी, पाने में सिर्फ 13 फीसदी

महिलाओं को अंगदान करने से परहेज करते हैं पुरुष

किडनी, लिवर की गंभीर बीमारी का पता चलते ही बंद कर देते हैं महिलाओं का इलाज

- चंद्रभान यादव- अमर उजाला ब्यूरो

लखनऊ। प्रदेश में अभी अंगदान को लेकर सोच नहीं बदली है। हालात यह है कि अंगदान करने के मामले में महिलाओं की हिस्सेदारी 87 फीसदी है, जबकि अंग पाने में सिर्फ 13 फीसदी। गंभीर बीमारी से जूझ रही तमाम महिलाएं अंग के इंतजार में दम तोड़ देती हैं। परिवार के पुरुष अंगदान के लिए तैयार नहीं होते हैं। प्रदेश के चिकित्सा संस्थानों में ऐसे भी केस आ रहे हैं, जिसमें महिलाओं में किडनी, लिवर की गंभीर बीमारी होने पर उपचार ही बंद कर दिया जाता है।

राज्य अंग एवं ऊतक प्रत्यारोपण संगठन (एसओटीटीओ) की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक पुरुष मरीजों को लिवर एवं किडनी दान करने वाली 87 फीसदी महिलाएं होती हैं। इसमें करीब 50 फीसदी केस में पत्नी अंगदान करती हैं। पत्नी के नहीं रहने पर 38 फीसदी केस में मां दान देती है। इसी तरह पिता की हिस्सेदारी 10 फीसदी और बहन की डेढ़ फीसदी और भाई की एक फीसदी हिस्सेदारी होती है। एसओटीटीओ के निदेशक प्रो आर हर्षवर्धन कहते हैं कि महिला महिलाओं को दाम में अंग दिलाना चुनौती है। पीछे मूल कारण सामाजिक सोच है। अंगदान के मामले में पुरुषों की सोच अभी नहीं बदली है। परिवार के किसी पुरुष को अंग की जरूरत पड़ती है तो पत्नी और मां तत्काल आगे आ जाती है, लेकिन किसी महिला को अंग की जरूरत पड़ती है तो कोई पुरुष अंगदान करना भी चाहे तो परिवार के अन्य सदस्य प्रोत्साहन के बजाय हतोत्साहित करते हैं।

34 में सिर्फ एक महिला को मिला लिवर

केजीएमयू में 34 मरीजों का लिवर प्रत्यारोपण किया गया। इसमें 32 पुरुष और दो महिलाएं हैं। एक महिला को बेटे के दान दिया, जबकि दूसरे को कैडवर (ब्रेनडेड के बाद अंगदान) से मिला था। गैस्ट्रोसर्जरी विभागाध्यक्ष प्रो अभिजीत चंद्रा बताते हैं कि लिवर प्रत्यारोपण में सिर्फ लोब लिया जाता है। यह कुछ दिन में बढ़कर तैयार हो जाता है। महिलाओं के लिए दान करने में पुरुष आगे नहीं आते हैं।

बीमारी पता लगते ही बंद कर देते हैं इलाज

केजीएमयू में अब तक आठ किडनी प्रत्यारोपण हुए हैं। इसमें सिर्फ एक महिला का प्रत्यारोपण हुआ है, वह भी कैडवर। यहां की टीम कई मरीजों को प्रत्यारोपण के लिए तैयार करके रखा है। नेफ्रोलॉजी विभाग के अध्यक्ष प्रो विश्वजीत सिंह बताते हैं कि अंगदान के लिए जागरूकता पर निरंतर कार्य करने की जरूरत है। अभी महिलाओं के उपचार को भी तवज्जो नहीं दी जाती है।

ओपीडी में आने वाली महिला मरीज के परिजनों को किडनी की गंभीर स्थिति बता दिए जाने से वे आगे का इलाज ही बंद करने की कोशिश करते हैं।

महिलाओं के लिए अंगदान कराने में कई तरह की मुश्किलें

पीजीआई के नेफ्रोलॉजी विभागाध्यक्ष प्रो नारायण प्रसाद कहते हैं कि संस्थान में हर साल करीब 140 किडनी प्रत्यारोपण हो रहे हैं। इसमें महिलाओं की हिस्सेदारी सिर्फ 10 फीसदी है। महिला को प्रत्यारोपण की जरूरत पड़ती है तो परिवार के लोगों की काउंसिलिंग में ज्यादा वक्त लगता है। कई बार समझाने के बाद कोई सदस्य तैयार होता है। उसमें भी कोशिश रहती है कि किसी न किसी महिला सदस्य का ही अंगदान करा दिया जाए। परिवार के सदस्यों का इस बात पर जोर रहता है कि कैडवर मिल जाए तो ज्यादा बेहतर रहेगा।

क्या है प्रदेश की स्थिति

प्रदेश में 65 सरकारी और निजी अस्पतालों ने अंगदान के लिए लाइसेंस ले रखा है। अभी केजीएमयू, पीजीआई, लोहिया संस्थान में अंग प्रत्यारोपण हो रहा है। इसमें सर्वाधिक 140 से 150 किडनी प्रत्यारोपण पीजीआई कर रहा है। इसी तरह लखनऊ स्थित निजी संस्थानों में भी किडनी और लिवर प्रत्यारोपण की शुरुआत हुई है। पूरे प्रदेश में वर्षभर में करीब ढाई सौ प्रत्यारोपण हो रहे हैं, जिसमें महिलाओं की हिस्सेदारी करीब 25 से 30 तक है। हार्ट प्रत्यारोपण का लाइसेंस सिर्फ पीजीआई के पास है, लेकिन अभी शुरु नहीं हुआ है।



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‘Then Don’t Do Films:’ How Women Actors in Bengali Film Industry Are ‘Silenced’

By **Varsha Sriram & Madhushree Goswami**, *thequint.com*

‘Then Don’t Do Films:’ How Women Actors in Bengali Film Industry Are ‘Silenced’

The Hema report came at a time when safer workplaces for women was under the spotlight over the RG Kar rape case.

While the report ‘shocked’ her, she wasn’t ‘too surprised’.

“This is what most of us women artists go through on a daily basis... There is an understated expectation for ‘compromise’ or ‘sex on demand’ within the Bengali film industry, too. This systemic patriarchy, which has been normalised, is extremely problematic.”

- Tanika Basu to The Quint

The Hema Committee report comes at a time when the debate for safer workplaces is under the spotlight over the rape and murder of the postgraduate trainee doctor in Kolkata’s RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

As the protests in the West Bengal capital continue to rage, at least five films, including Parambrata Chattopadhyay’s *Ei Raat Tomar Ama*, Ron Raj’s *Porichoy Gupta*, Saurav Palodhi’s *Onko Ki Kothin*, and Krishnendu Chatterjee’s *Jomaloye Jibonto Bhanu*, have either been rescheduled or indefinitely postponed.

In an Instagram post on Wednesday, 11 September, actor Ritabhari Chakraborty said that the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has agreed to create a body similar to the Hema Committee to investigate the sexual harassment allegations in the Bengali industry.

“... An unbiased committee of 5, headed by a former justice was formed consisting of women of different designation from doctor to Lawyer who will investigate the sexual harassment practices in Bengali Film Industry and create a report. First step towards unmaking the predators.”

- Ritabhari Chakraborty in an Instagram post

This comes after nearly 50 women artists from the Women's Forum for Screen Workers released a charter of demands advocating for safer working conditions in the industry.

'Sexual Abuse Rampant in Bengali Film Industry'

"Sexual abuse and misogyny have been normalised in the Bengali film industry for years. I have been at the receiving end of such behaviour for years now. It is an open secret," said Sreelekha Mitra, who is best known for her role in *Once Upon a Time in Calcutta*.

At least five women actors alleged to *The Quint* that sexual abuse and misconduct was prevalent within the industry. Mitra was among the first few to speak out and file a police complaint against Malayalam movie director Ranjith alleging misbehaviour, which forced him to resign as chairman of the Kerala Film Academy.

Ranjith has denied the allegations. Elaborating on the 'understated expectation for sex on demand', Basu, who has been in the industry for 10 years, said,

"In 2023, I was taken aback when a casting director sent me a form to fill up, below which there was a clause asking, 'If I was comfortable in compromise'. When I asked him what it means, he said that he was surprised that despite working for years in the industry, 'I did not know what that means'. He said that I needn't sign it if I didn't want to, but I was still shocked that this happened..."

- Tanika Basu to *The Quint*

Ananya Sen, who acted in *A Suitable Boy* directed by Mira Nair, admitted that as a male-dominated industry, patriarchy and misogyny are both 'instilled'.

"A very senior actor in the industry would joke about how he used to shoot intimate scenes multiple times to touch a woman's breasts. He has done **that with me too. The irony is that after being felt up, I did not realise. I never spoke up, but maybe I should have. I understand that it is wrong...**" Sen Said.

When asked how 'compromises' would be asked for, "Samajdaro ke liye ishare kaafi hote hai (a hint is enough for the wise)" is how Basu described it.

“People won’t use the word ‘compromise’ but will make it somewhat clear that you have to meet them and be available whenever they call you for a meeting late in the night. If you say no, you will be sidelined. You probably won’t get more work from that production house for the next couple of years.”

- Tanika Basu to The Quint

The Hema Committee report, too, highlighted how women in the Malayalam film industry were scared to speak out over the “fear of being sidelined.”

“In most cases, when this (sexual misconduct) happens, women end up keeping quiet because of the fear... Going to the police is not the solution because most of the time, we are told that since we belong to the industry, this is bound to happen... ‘Then don’t do films’ is the response,” Sen said.

On 8 September, the Directors’ Association of Eastern India suspended a Bengali filmmaker after an actress approached the West Bengal **Commission for Women, accusing him of harassment and indecent behaviour.**

The filmmaker denied allegations, saying what was being construed as misbehaviour was “unintentional,” according to reports.

‘Been Told I am Not Sexy Enough’

Women actors also highlighted how sexist jokes and body shaming were commonplace. Basu told The Quint that male actors and technicians feel “entitled to make lewd comments as jokes”. She recounted how she was denied movie roles because she was told that she was “not sexy or hot enough...” and that she would “not sell”.

“If you speak back to them, they call you ‘a feminist’ and brush it off as a joke. But why would you joke about it? Who is giving you this entitlement to body shame us? When they call us feminists, it is as if they are abusing us.”

- Tanika Basu to The Quint

Sen recounted how senior male actors, directors, and technicians talk about women and their body parts to their faces. “When you speak up, you are asked to take it as a joke and be alright with it...” she added.

Sen, who earlier worked as an assistant director, also highlighted the lack of basic facilities for women technicians in the film industry. “I remember when I was an assistant director, there would be no toilet. We won’t be able to use the bathroom for hours. We weren’t allowed to go and use the one which was in the actor’s vanity van,” she said.

Actor-director Parambrata Chattopadhyay, who’s known for films like *Kahaani* and *Abhijaan*, told *The Quint*, “Sexual harassment, unfortunately, has been normalised for decades in every single film industry.”

“Yes, there is misogyny, patriarchy and exploitation,” he conceded.

“As male members of this fraternity, we have certain responsibilities... I (an actor) cannot suddenly pass a comment to a woman (about her). The normalisation of these things leads to other incidents like a male co-actor knocking on a female co-actor’s door in the wee hours of the night (as was reported in Malayalam film industry in the Hema).”

The women actors further highlighted the huge pay parity between male and female actors within the Bengali film industry.

“We as female actors want for our work to be consumed, not for us to be consumed,” added Basu.

Meanwhile, Rupanjana Mitra, a Bengali film and television actress, lamented to *The Quint* that the conversation always ends at “we need better safeguards for women” but then “the cycle of abuse repeats”.

“When will actual change come about? Until and unless, our thinking does not change such incidents will keep happening. Women who are in the industry are often vulnerable as a film set does not follow a specific routine with fixed rules or guidelines. Many men in strong positions in such a setting utilise such a skewed power dynamic to their favour.”

- Rupanjana Mitra to *The Quint*

However, Sreelekha Mitra said that the discussion was taking place now since the spotlight is on violence against women.

“My question is, why should it take such instances to speak out against it? Since I was vocal about it from the beginning, I was sidelined, and segregated from the industry, and was not given acting jobs while the

meaty roles went to those who kept mum. This is what you get for speaking the truth out here, I guess,” Mitra told The Quint.

RG Kar Protests, Charter of Demands, & Postponement of Movies

Over the last few weeks, several actors, producers, directors, camerapersons, and technicians have joined the protests in Kolkata in large numbers.

“We haven’t seen protests like this on the streets of Kolkata in the last 10-15 years. We are appalled at what has happened in our city which is otherwise considered one of the safer places. The protests have come because of a lot of reasons, including this being the most heinous crimes we’ve come across.”

- Parambrata Chattopadhyay

Chattopadhyay added that the justice has to be two-fold. “One is immediate justice for the victim... Two, a plea and cry targeted at the state machinery, so they admit that there were issues which has led to something as terrible and horrific as this.”

He added that the postponement of the release of the films was “essentially because of the climate which is the aftermath of the RG Kar incident.”

On 3 September, the Mamata Banerjee-led government passed the Aparajita Woman and Child (West Bengal Criminal Laws and Amendment) Bill 2024, introducing death penalty for the convicted perpetrator in instances when the assault kills or leaves the victim in a vegetative state.

Speaking to The Quint, a Trinamool Congress spokesperson, who did not wish to be named, said, “Let see if any such incident is taking place... obviously the state government will take action”, adding, “As you know there is so much misinformation going on”.

Meanwhile, the Women’s Forum for Screen Workers on 27 August wrote to four bodies, including Federation of Cine Technicians and Workers of Eastern India (FCTWEI), West Bengal Motion Pictures Artist Forum, Eastern India Motion Picture Association, Tele Academy, and the West Bengal government asking for better working conditions for women.

The letter not only highlighted the lack of functional support systems to prevent and address sexual harassment but spoke about the silence regarding recurring incidents of abuse in their workplaces.

“As women working in the Bengali film, web platform and television industry, we face various kinds of sexual abuse every day; as well as regularly hear of the rampant abuse faced by women, children and those of marginal identities. Yet, neither there is a functional support system in place to enable us to demand the Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment under the existing laws of India...”

- Women's Forum For Screen Workers

Basu, Sen, and actor Churni Ganguly (who recently portrayed the role of Alia Bhatt's mother in *Rocky Aur Rani ki Prem Kahani*) told The Quint that though the charter was already in the works, the Hema Committee report had pushed women actors to come out and speak about the abuse they face.

“It would make perfect sense to formalise a social audit of the prevailing conditions in the Bengali film industry right now. The Womens' Forum of Screen Workers have made certain very valid points in this regard,” Ganguly told The Quint.

“We've experienced misogyny and patriarchy in our field, especially because this industry has a lot of male gazes. We were already in talks on how we can fight this. It was during this time that the Hema report came out. Many got the confidence to come out with their own experiences, and everything fell into place,” Basu said.

The FCTWEI, on 30 August, launched the Suraksha Bandhu Committee to address and resolve complaints of sexual misconduct on film sets.

The association emphasised on the industry's zero-tolerance stance on the mistreatment of women and assured that any complaints received would be treated with utmost confidentiality, and the identity of the complainants would be protected.

The Quint reached out to FCTWEI president Swaroop Biswas via call and text. We will update the story if and when he responds.

‘Need For Systemic Change’

The Women’s Forum for Screen Workers recommended multiple suggestions to improve the working conditions of women in Bengali cinema, some of which include:

- The need for an ‘intimacy coordinator’ or ‘intimacy director’ in film sets
- A 24x7 helpline for survivors of sexual harassment as an effective tool of ‘whistleblowing’
- Adoption of the widest possible definition of ‘workplace’ and ‘worker’ as laid out in the POSH Act, 2013
- Addressing gender-based violence in the workplace through the use of international regulations like the ILO Convention No. 190 [C190] which recognises the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment
- Regular awareness initiatives on the workers’ rights and procedures to seek justice when that right is denied without fear or favour

“This can foster an important conversation in Bengali cinema. There needs to be a systemic change in our industry and society. We need a solid support system, and good legal reforms,” Tanika Basu said, adding that this is the “beginning of a long journey ahead”.

Ananya Sen told The Quint that she is looking forward to the creation of a body like the Women’s Cinema Collective (WCC) in Kerala.

Ganguly pointed out that it is the collective responsibility of everyone on set to ensure “that a safe working environment is provided to women actors, technicians, and artistes.”

“The first thing that we need is to clearly lay out a code of conduct for productions. While there are clear guidelines coming from the Vishaka Committee, the realities within a film industry workspace have nuanced, practical differences. We need to create this sitting with all the stakeholders, especially women, children, and LGBTQ+ members of our industry. These guidelines should then, through discussions,

get accepted by all the stakeholders in the industry. Once we formalise this, it could be a very good starting point of reference for moving forward towards a more sensitive and equitable environment. While things need to happen, we also need to be patient about outcomes.”

- Churni Ganguly

Conceding to Ganguly, Parambrata Chattopadhyay said that there is a need of a code of conduct and constitution of a neutral and independent Internals Complaint Committee (ICC). “There has to be a code of conduct (based on how the film industry functions). If it means we need to have strict rules and regulations, so be it,” he added.

(The story has been updated with the TMC spokesperson’s response.)



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<https://www.thequint.com/gender/bengali-film-industry-rg-kar-protests-kolkata-hema-committee-women-actors-speak-out>

The Gulmohar that Blossoms in Bitterness (Translated from Marathi)

By **Rahee Shruti Ganesh**, Nabz Eidotsav

The pile of books returning from Tihar grows taller and taller each time. Behind Dostoevsky stands Romila Thapar, beside him Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and on top of the stack rests *Kafkaland*. Another set is already being readied for next week's trip there; he must have already devoured the previous bundle.

She sighs, then smiles to herself — there's no space left for another stack. They'll need another bookshelf soon! She gently flips open the top book, slips in a flower she received from Tihar, and closes it tenderly. Every book that returns from that prison carries within it a flower — fragile, pressed between pages, yet radiant with life. How effortlessly these books — and those flowers — have crossed the prison's massive walls.

Banojyotsna Lahiri, the woman who loves Umar Khalid, too has that miraculous ability to cross walls. Together, over more than a decade, they've earned that strength.

So even when the sky seems to collapse again and again, her fierce integrity and values remain unscarred. She jokes, her trademark mischief intact,

"It's been three years now — Umar and I live in the same city and yet we're in a long-distance relationship!

Our dates happen in court — we talk through glances and gestures. Just yesterday, I told him his haircut looked weird. He said, 'Yours looks like Messi's!' And I snapped back, 'Oh please, don't compare yourself to Messi!' Umar doesn't even watch football — he only follows IPL. He once asked me which team I support. I told him I don't even like cricket — and anyway, IPL isn't cricket!"

Bano feigns irritation; Umar just laughs quietly.

It's been over a decade since they first met — and even before that, Umar's life had already taken a sharp turn. His political clarity and moral compass were beginning to form.

Umar's father was from Nagpur, his mother from Uttar Pradesh, but he is every bit a Delhi boy — raised in Jamia Nagar, Okhla. This neighbourhood, dense with Muslim families, is a patchwork of narrow lanes, open drains, and little cafés — Malabar Cafes run by Malayali nurses, biryani stalls, kebab counters, and the ceaseless hum of everyday survival.

It was in these lanes that the boy Umar fell in love with cricket. His mother remembers him as soft-spoken and gentle even as a child — respectful to elders, kind to peers, and always unwavering in his sense of what was right. “He's always been a man of principle,” she says.

He grew up in a city still seared by the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. When he was a small boy, the demolition of the Babri Masjid burned itself into his memory — the sight of weeping women watching men on television tear down a place of worship. Even at four, he sensed something had shifted — that many outside now saw his people as the enemy.

By the time he was thirteen, the Gujarat riots erupted, following the World Trade Center attacks. He was often the only Muslim student in his class. Teachers whispered “warnings”:

“You know those people... they marry four times, have sixteen children, say ‘*talaaq*’ thrice and abandon their wives. Our Hindu girls should stay away.”

Looking back, Umar says, “As I grew up, so did communalism.”

He first felt its sting deeply in 2008 — during the Batla House encounter near his home. The media branded Okhla a “den of terrorists.” Suddenly, rickshaw drivers refused to enter his area, delivery boys wouldn't come, and classmates looked at him with suspicion. That's when the full weight of being “Muslim” hit him.

Around that time, he met Banojyotsna Lahiri, then an MPhil student at JNU. Amid an atmosphere of hate, Umar's eyes opened wider. He saw the roots of every injustice in economic exploitation and found his answers in Marx. The growing inequality around him confirmed what he read — that all human history is the history of class struggle.

He was never particularly religious, but the more he saw, the more he believed that “religion is the opium of the masses.” He became an atheist, and in JNU, he and his comrades began recognising that caste was the unspoken absence in many Left movements. “For real change,” he said, “Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar must stand together.”

While researching the history of Adivasi struggles in Singhbhum for his PhD, Umar found himself drawn into the country’s people’s movements — Niyamgiri, the Maruti workers’ strike, the Rohith Vemula protests. But he couldn’t have imagined the storm that awaited him.

On February 9, 2016, a campus event spiralled into political theatre. Masked men shouted slogans; chaos erupted. Overnight, Umar Khalid was branded a “traitor.” Media studios became courtrooms, anchors became executioners. Arnab Goswami’s voice thundered:

“Umar Khalid! You are a greater threat to this country than Maoist terrorists!”

Before the police even registered a case, the television channels had already sentenced him. Within 24 hours, sedition charges were filed under Section 124A.

Umar, Kanhaiya, and Anirban were arrested. While authoritarian nationalism roared outside, inside Tihar they discovered new truths — that even in prison, Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim inmates were treated differently.

Kanhaiya chatted with constables about nationalism; Umar quietly observed. He realised that though he was an atheist, the system saw only his name — *Umar Khalid*. His trial, he felt, was not against him, but against every Muslim in India. “I was born guilty,” he joked to Anirban. “They see me as the enemy by birth.”

When the three were finally released for lack of evidence, JNU erupted in joy. Brecht’s lines echoed in Umar’s mind:

“General, your tank is powerful.
It runs over men.
But it has one defect —
It needs a driver.
And the driver has one defect —
He can think.”

Umar believed in that thinking human being. “They tell us to remember the soldiers who die at the border,” he once said. “But we love them enough to wish they never have to die. We want real peace — not the silence of a graveyard.”

Life after prison never returned to normal. His family began receiving death and rape threats. The same TV anchors who had destroyed his life never once apologised. Yet his parents and sisters stood by him — unshaken in their faith that Umar was right.

In 2017, at a “Freedom from Fear” event, a man tried to shoot him. The pistol jammed — a few inches and seconds stood between him and death.

After that, he understood viscerally: no matter what he did, India would see him as a Muslim first. He recalled Hannah Arendt’s words from Nazi Germany — *“When you are attacked as a Jew, you must resist as a Jew.”* When Prophet Muhammad was mocked online, Umar responded not with anger but by sharing the Prophet’s messages of peace and compassion.

By 2019–20, the anti-CAA movement was surging. From Jamia to Shaheen Bagh, dissent flowed like song — and Umar, Bano, and their friends were at its heart. As violence engulfed Delhi, the state turned its fury on activists. Old colonial laws like UAPA were revived.

Umar knew the pattern. He told friends, “In Chile, a man once asked — why arrest the innocent? And someone replied, ‘That’s your problem. You think people must have done something to be arrested.’”

In 2020, he too was arrested under UAPA — for a speech distorted online.

Three and a half years later, he remains in jail. His bail hearings postponed fourteen times. “Bail is the rule, jail the exception,” said the Chief Justice — but not for Umar Khalid. Like Father Stan Swamy, denied even a straw in prison, he too counts days behind bars.

Every week, his mother reaches through the van’s metal grille to touch his fingers for a moment before police order her to step back. He gets a fifteen-minute video call once a week, five minutes on the phone. When Bano answers, the countdown begins — and when the line cuts, each holds on to the unfinished words pressed close to their chest.

One Saturday morning, Umar called early. Bano missed it in her sleep and panicked. “What happened? Are you okay?” she asked later. He laughed gently:

“It was such a beautiful morning, I just wanted you to step outside and see it.”

She scolded him — “Idiot! You scared me half to death!” — but smiled through tears.

When people ask Bano if she ever regrets their choices, she replies instantly,

“Never. Even if someone gave me a time machine, I’d make every single decision the same way — and I know Umar would too. That’s who we are.”

It’s been a thousand days since Umar went to prison. As long as this fearless gardener remains behind bars, the loss is not his — it is India’s.

And even as hatred scorches the earth, somewhere, in defiance, a gulmohar still blooms.



Rahee S. G. is a writer and junior research fellow at ZHCES, JNU, focusing on education, political philosophy, and public policy. She has co-authored a Marathi book and writes across academic and popular media. Awarded the 2023 AIRS fellowship in Australia.

UN heard,
written,
told...

VII.

Climate, Environment & Resilience

*Showcasing the gendered impact of the climate crisis
and celebrating women as leaders of ecological
stewardship.*

The climate crisis is anything but gender-neutral. When fields crack, when floods rise, when forests burn — it is women who hold the fragments of survival together. Yet they are not just casualties of collapse; they are the architects of renewal, reimagining resilience in the face of loss. This section gathers stories that trace both the gendered costs of ecological breakdown and the women leading the quiet revolution to restore balance.

In *Frontline Defenders*, Aishwarya Mohanty and Nidhi Jamwal spotlight women turning scarcity into strength. In *Unseen Exploitation* Chetan Dwivedi reveals how climate distress and poverty intertwine to fuel trafficking and exploitation.

These stories make one thing clear: climate justice is inseparable from gender justice — and the women at the frontlines are already charting the way to a livable future.

Frontline Defenders:

Spotlighting women as leaders in climate resilience and conservation.

1. **Aishwarya Mohanty** - In Koraput's Villages, Women Are Charting A Map For Sustainable Living
2. **Nidhi Jamwal** - The Village Classroom: Rural Indian Women Can Teach About Climate Resilience, Fight for Survival

Unseen Exploitation: Exposing how climate change and poverty increase vulnerability.

1. **Chetan Dwivedi** - 5 saal taq ki lease par bik rahi betiyan: Mata-Pita hee parivar ka karz utarne ko UP-MP taq bhej rahe

In Koraput's Villages, Women Are Charting A Map For Sustainable Living

By *Aishwarya Mohanty*, behanbox.com

Forests, water-bodies, flowers, tubers and bears have disappeared from the biodiversity rich villages of Koraput because of climate change. The women are trying to draft a map to understand the loss and plan ahead for conservation.

Women in 10 villages have mapped their commons using government records and historical data/ Aishwarya Mohanty “Our forests are vanishing, and with them, our way of life,” says Moina Nayak, 30, a resident of Khudiguda village in Koraput's Borigumma block in Odisha. The lush green forest that surrounds her home is vanishing fast and along with it, the unique flora and fauna that sustain livelihoods, traditions, and food security. This, however, is not a story of resignation and despair. The women of Khudiguda and nine other villages in Koraput have banded together to respond to the crisis in an unusual way – they have become dedicated cartographers, meticulously mapping their commons using government records and historical data.

The maps are now physical documents of the changes caused over time by natural and man-made interventions. And they are signposts for how the women should devise their own mitigation plans by planting more trees and adopting more traditional practices of agriculture and conservation. Commons are resources shared by a community and in rural Odisha these are threatened by environmental degradation caused by deforestation, pollution, overexploitation and climate change. The hand-made maps could help the women protect village boundaries and common areas such as residential zones, ponds, canals, roads, and grazing lands. They also detail surviving species of fruit, vegetable, flora, and fauna.

“The village boundaries are more or less the same, what has changed are the homestead lands, agricultural lands, water bodies and forest covers within the village. The old map showed there were four different ponds in the village, now we just have one. Water had dried

out and eventually, a village resource centre was created. The village has developed too, but at the cost of our own natural resources,” said Chandrama Gadaba, 70, who came to the village more than 50 years ago when she got married.

“Much of the younger generation in the village hasn’t even seen the kind of edible forest produce that we consumed. So we all sat together to enlist the kind of edible produce we ate, the wildlife we observed – animals and birds. For instance, we have seen bears around, but now we do not see them anymore,” she added. The strengthening of commons becomes important, especially in the context of climate change because it allows women to continue their lives and livelihood, says Neha Saigal, director, gender and climate change at Asar Social Impact Advisors. The group along with the Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD), a Koraput based NGO, assisted the mapping process in these villages. “It is not a part of the climate change discourse the way it should be,” says Neha.

Intertwined Lives

Women are considered sustainers of micro-economic rural activities because of their indigenous knowledge and management of natural resources. It is also a part of their traditional gender role. But several factors have strained this link.

Koraput, popularly known as the land of indigenous tribes, is a biodiversity-rich region with at least seven indigenous groups residing in the hills and forests. However, over the years, the district, situated nearly 500 km from the state capital, has experienced a gradual decline in its biodiversity. According to Global Forest Watch, an online platform that provides data and tools for monitoring forests, between 2002 and 2023, Koraput lost 759 ha of humid primary forest which is 9.5% of its total tree cover loss in the same period. In the last two decades, the district has also witnessed a decrease of 7.6% in tree cover.

The hilly district was swept by a heat wave in April this year, a very rare event for it. The temperatures exceeded 40 degree Celsius though the average temperature recorded here in April is 26 degrees Celsius. The normal maximum is usually 33 degrees Celsius in May.

Studies have shown how human activities, severe climatic events, fire, pests, diseases and other environmental disturbances may degrade forests and thereby reduce the provision of forest goods and services, biodiversity values, productivity and health. A study specific to Odisha also pointed out that forest cover loss in the state was concentrated in districts with larger areas under mining, mainly near the Koraput mine and Damanjodi refinery.

Losing Autonomy

Moina and her fellow villagers feel the strain as these vital resources become harder to find, threatening their cultural well-being, livelihoods, and even food security. The last forces them to depend more on market purchases, straining their finances and further stressing their already precarious lives.

Moina recalls the abundance of food the forest once provided. “We used to gather a lot of edible fruits, shoots, shrubs, vegetables and uncultivated foods from the forest, enough to feed our families and even sell in the market. Now, we barely find enough for ourselves. Our mothers hardly ever bought anything from the market to eat, but we are forced to do so now,” she says.

A woman in Khudiguda village with her daily harvest from the forest/
Aishwarya Mohanty

The frequency of visiting the forests has also reduced. “In summer months, we went to the forest around 4 in the morning and we would pluck all we could – for the day’s meal and something to sell too. We would return home around 10 am, cook and eat some mandia (ragi), prepare meals for the family, finish all the household chores and go back to the forest again if needed,” recalls Padmawati Halwa, 53, a resident of Biriphulguma village in the district’s Jeypore block.

Now this is difficult, she says, because even deep inside the forest it is hot because the trees have mostly disappeared. “Then there is not much that we find. Even in the most lean period, we used to visit the forest at least thrice a week, now it’s once in a week or two weeks,” she says. But the impact extends beyond food security. Shifting rainfall patterns and shrinking forest lands have pushed men to migrate for work or engage in small-scale farming, often keeping the income for themselves.

Women, who once earned money by selling forest produce, now find themselves economically sidelined.

For most women, the forest produce that they collected was also bartered to buy other home essentials like salt, sugar, oil, etc in exchange from local grocery shops or other villagers. “The priorities are different for men and women when it comes to spending money,” says Lachama Penthia, 65. “Men divide the income between liquor and household responsibilities, while women prioritise household needs and saving for their children’s future.”

Mapping Change

A study by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) highlights how women and other disadvantaged groups are susceptible to climate shocks due to the poor diversification of their assets, as well as low access to resources to cope with and recover from loss. Experts feel that strengthening commons would directly impact the lives and livelihoods of indigenous women.

“Strengthening commons is a critical strategy that falls right between climate adaptation, climate mitigation, and resilience,” says Neha Saigal of ASAR.

When quizzed, the women were quick to explain the changes they have observed. “The village pond has become smaller over the years.” “The soil moisture has reduced, the land feels drier.” “We brought karadi (safflower) from the forest and prepared our own oil. Now there is none left and we buy it from the market.” Or, “With the onset of monsoon, the forest floor was full of tubers rooted deep inside the soil. But now we get the tuber almost a month after monsoon and it isn’t as deeply rooted, limiting the nutritional value it provides otherwise.”

The concerns are similar across the villages that BehanBox visited to understand the exercise.

The process has been rather elaborate. In 1963 Koraput had its first survey settlement – a revenue recording process when a village or any administrative unit is set up. The women first got hold of the Record of Rights for their village from the 1960s. Using the data, they figured out what had changed in their villages in terms of land, water bodies and wasteland. For instance in Khudiguda village, in 1963, the survey

settlement map showed 129.14 acres of land in the village, which has reduced over the years.

“We had no clue about such maps. We thought that only the government made maps which we all should follow. But when we realised its power we readily jumped in,” Penthia says. The mapping process reflects the nuanced understanding that community members have about their environment/ Aishwarya Mohanty.

Over 20 days of exhaustive mapping, the women, some as old as 90, drew from their memories to document the changes, covering the length and breadth of their village boundaries. The exercise was a depiction of local knowledge, perspectives, and expertise, ensuring that the map reflects the nuanced understanding that community members have about their environment. Apart from just mapping their commons, the women are also encouraging each other to think of ways to sustain the commons.

Sustaining Commons

“We knew about these changes but when we translated them on paper we could understand the magnitude of it all,” says Damyanti Gabada, 47. The term ‘tragedy of commons’ was first posited by American ecologist Garret Hardin in 1968, and it meant “a situation where shared environmental resources are overused and exploited and eventually depleted, posing risks to everyone involved”. Hardin argued that to prevent this, there should be restrictions on its usage. This is what the women of Koraput are doing.

“Over the years we have formed forest protection committees to ensure that forest produce, specifically wood, is not overused and overexploited. But there are multiple other factors that we need to take care of too,” says Kamli Muduli, 37. “Our ancestors had specific ways of plucking fruits or cutting trees and even harvesting tubers. For instance, one of the best ways to harvest tubers is to keep a part of them inside the soil. This way the tuber grows again. But now we tend to uproot the entire tuber in our ignorance. It is a simple practice.” The villages have a list of tubers that they used to harvest that are no longer available with local names such as pit, daur, saranda, and cherai. But the women also need administrative support.

“The governance of the commons falls across several departments. So convergence becomes very important to support communities in strengthening their commons. These documents will undoubtedly start a dialogue between the community and the administration. They must be taken into consideration for the Gram Panchayat Development Plan, one way of mainstreaming these efforts,” says Saigal of ASAR.



Aishwarya Mohanty is a journalist reporting on the intersection of gender, environment, rural issues and social justice.

<https://behanbox.com/2024/07/11/in-koraputs-villages-women-are-charting-a-map-for-sustainable-living/>

The Village Classroom: Rural Indian Women Can Teach About Climate Resilience, Fight For Survival

By Nidhi Jamwal, Kashmirtimes.com

“On International Women’s Day, I acknowledge and thank those rural women who taught me about climate resilience, environment protection, and how to fight for survival.”

It was during a reporting assignment that I found myself in a tribal village on the Bihar and Jharkhand border. It was inside the forests, an area once known for Maoist activities. I met Soni Murmu there who told me about her tryst with YouTube.

Soni, a madhu palak (bee keeper), lives in Rasuiya village with her husband, a farmer, and their son, who is in middle school. Soni herself has not gone to school.

But that has in no way stopped her from running a flourishing honey business from her village in Banka district of Bihar and through an all-women FPO (farmer producer organisation). The honey she produces goes to clients as far as Mumbai.

Intrigued, I asked the Santhal Adivasi woman, who in the back of beyond village taught her bee-keeping and the business of honey.

“YouTube,” she replied. “Whenever I am free, I watch videos on the phone [smartphone] to learn new things. I used to watch videos on bee-keeping on YouTube, and during the pandemic when my husband had no work, I decided to try my hands at bee-keeping,” Soni smiled shyly.

I was surprised. Here was Soni, who was breaking down all preconceived notions of the tribal women living in remote corners of the country. She was strong, confident and efficiently running an enterprise, and had plans to add more bee boxes to her business.



Rural women constitute 48 percent of the country's total rural population of 833 million (which is more than the total population of Europe at 742 million). But women from the villages in the country make it to mainstream media either when they are raped and murdered, or when a handful of them are picked to receive the Padma Awards. The rest of them live out their days in oblivion.

But time and again, as an environmental journalist, I have experienced something different. It is the rural and tribal women who have taught me some very important lessons in conservation and resilience, and what they know about 'climate resilience', would fill books.

In 2017, I travelled in north Bihar to report on floods. There, in Sahorwa village, in Ghongepur panchayat of Saharsa district, I saw what every other visitor to the Musahar (colloquially referred to as rat eaters) village of an extremely marginalised Mahadalit community saw. Poverty, open defecation, naked children running around on the kachcha lanes...

But, it was the women there who sat me down on a charpoy and it was there that I learnt all about the flood-compatible paddy variety, the indigenous desariya dhan, that they cultivated and ate. In that classroom under a tree, the ‘unlettered’ women of Sahorwa taught me about climate resilient crops that grew right there on their flooded fields not too far from my charpoy.

Sahorwa lies between the embankments of two major rivers in north Bihar – Kosi and Kamla Balan. Surrounded by water, its farmlands remain inundated under several feet of water levels for seven to eight months in a year making regular farming practices impossible.

This has led to the menfolk migrating in search of work. The community is so poor that buying foodgrains from outside is an expensive dream. But the women manage with the wisdom and lived experiences of a community that has lived in want for hundreds of years. They have lived with floods for centuries and have evolved their lifestyles, livelihoods and eating habits around it.

Desariya paddy, which they cultivate, is supposed to have evolved from the wild rice varieties grown in eastern Indo-Gangetic plains. It grows in flood conditions, and is hardy and nutritious. The coarse grains of desariya rice come in three varieties – white grain, black grain, and a mix of black-white grain. The latter is also known as cheeta or barogar dhan.

When I asked my teachers if they sold the desariya rice they grew, they laughed at my question. “Desariya dhan is a poor man’s rice. It is coarse and doesn’t look good. Why will anyone buy it? There are better rice varieties in the market. Also, we are able to grow only enough to feed our families.”



Rice aside, those women also have a local source of rich protein in their diet – ghongha (freshwater snail). The women stand in the chest-deep waters of their flooded fields and catch them.

Over 150 kilometres south of Saharsa district, across the Ganges in south Bihar, lies Kedia village in Jamui district. Here the women have helped turn their village into an organic village, and they also generate biogas which is used as a cooking fuel in their kitchens. Women feel strongly for organic farming as they are the ones, who do most farm labour work and are concerned about the health and nutrition of their children.

Those of us who churn out reports on climate change, climate vulnerability, adaptation and mitigation strategies from our comfortable offices and homes have much to learn from rural women. I know I learnt so much from the women of Sahorwa and Kedia and even Rasuiya. About preserving and cultivating indigenous and climate resilient varieties of crops, improving the health of soils and their families, and displaying remarkable resilience in the face of climate change and the ravages of floods.

This is not to discount the biases and discrimination rural women face. I know that the women I spoke to in Sahorwa battled prejudice of class, caste and gender. But, they are not taking things lying down. They continue to be a repository of traditional knowledge. And, while it may not be widely acknowledged, they are the backbone of our rural agrarian economy. Solutions to many of the complex problems of climate change and ecological destruction will come from the lived experiences of these women and their cumulative learnings.

In December 2022, Gaon Connection released a report titled 50 Success Stories of Rural Women in the Pandemic, which has documented several such stories of women. The book is available for a free download. Go ahead, download and read it to celebrate International Women's Day!



Nidhi Jamwal is a journalist based in Mumbai. She writes on environment, climate, and rural issues.

<https://kashmirtimes.com/opinion/comment-articles/the-village-classroom-in-india>

5 साल तक की लीज पर बिक रही बेटियां; माता-पिता ही परिवार का कर्ज उतारने को यूपी-एमपी तक भेज रहे

By **Chetan Dwivedi**, Dainik Bhaskar

हाड़ौती के साथ प्रदेश के 10 जिलों में बेटियां 5 साल तक की लीज पर बिक रही हैं। राजस्थान के अलावा उत्तर प्रदेश और मध्य प्रदेश के दलाल अब इनका इस्तेमाल प्रॉपर्टी की तरह करने लगे हैं। इस धिनौने कृत्य के पीछे कोई और नहीं, खुद माता-पिता ही हैं। वे परिवार का कर्ज उतारने और भरण-पोषण के लिए बेटियों को दूसरे राज्यों के दलालों को लीज पर दे रहे हैं। दलाल इन्हें हर दिन बेचकर कर्ज की भरपाई करते हैं। जब तक कर्ज नहीं उतरता, तब तक इनका हर दिन शोषण एवं दुष्कर्म होता है। इस बीच अगर बच्ची भागकर वापस घर आ भी जाती है तो बेटे को दलाल के पास छोड़ना माता-पिता की भी मजबूरी होती है।

भास्कर इन्वेस्टिगेशन में सामने आया है कि लड़कियों की सौदेबाजी प्रदेश के 10 जिलों में सर्वाधिक हैं। इनमें सवाईमाधोपुर, बूंदी, भीलवाड़ा, टोंक, भरतपुर, अलवर, झालावाड़, बारां तथा जयपुर के चाकसू व जोधपुर हैं।

यहां पांच साल तक के लिए 2 से 10 लाख में बच्चियों को लीज पर दिया जा रहा है। इनमें से नाममात्र बच्चियों की तो पुलिस व सीडब्ल्यूसी की पहल पर घर वापसी हो रही है, लेकिन अधिकांश इसी दलदल में फंसकर रह जाती हैं। जो आज भी वहां से निकलने के लिए समाज के प्रतिनिधियों को पत्र लिखती हैं। इसलिए इन स्थानों पर कुंवारों को लड़कियां नहीं मिलने से इनकी संख्या भी साढ़े पांच हजार तक पहुंच गई है।

- बेटियों के दर्द भरे किस्से... जो कभी उजागर नहीं हुए

8 साल की बच्ची साढ़े तीन लाख में 3 साल की लीज पर दी, हर दिन 5 से 10 बार दुष्कर्म : झालावाड़ से 8 साल की एक बच्ची को दिसंबर 2020 में बूंदी जिले के एक गांव में साढ़े 3 लाख रुपए में लीज पर भेजा गया। यहां बच्ची को नशा देकर मारपीट की जाती थी और उसके साथ दिन में 5 से 10 बार दुष्कर्म होता था। इस बीच पिता बच्ची से मिलने आया, लेकिन खरीदार ने बच्ची से नहीं मिलवाया। बाद में दिसंबर 2021 में एक एनजीओ के सहयोग से सदर थाना पुलिस ने बच्ची को रेस्क्यू किया तो वह 6 महीने तक मेंटल ट्रोमा में रही। अब यह बच्ची

सीडब्ल्यूसी बूंदी के पास है और माता-पिता के पास जाना चाहती है। इस बच्ची के पिता ने कर्ज उतारने के लिए 3 साल के लिए लीज पर दिया था।

- 18 लाख का कर्ज उतारने के लिए कमाई के 50 प्रतिशत पर मां ने आगरा में लीज पर दिया

बूंदी के एक गांव की नाबालिग को उसी की मां ने 13 साल की उम्र में 18 लाख का कर्जा उतारने के लिए देह व्यापार के लिए आगरा में साल 2023 में लीज पर ठेकेदार के पास भेज दिया। वहां उसकी कमाई का 50 प्रतिशत तो दलाल अपने पास रख लेता था और 50 प्रतिशत राशि उसे दे देता था। बाद में आगरा में एक एनजीओ के मार्फत मार्च 2024 में बच्ची को रेस्क्यू किया गया, बूंदी में प्रकरण सामने आया। उस समय बच्ची का हीमोग्लोबिन 5 ग्राम ही था।

- घर खर्च के लिए मां ने बेटी को 3 बार लीज पर भेजा

भीलवाड़ा जिले के एक गांव से 13 साल की बच्ची को उसकी मां ने तीन बार लीज पर भेजा। सबसे पहले साल 2019 में डेढ़ लाख में ग्वालियर में एक साल के लिए, फिर सवाईमाधोपुर में एक साल और बाद में पांच लाख रुपये के लिए नागपुर में तीन साल के लिए लीज पर दे दिया। जब नागपुर पुलिस ने रेड के दौरान इस बच्ची को पकड़ा तो उसे वहां सीडब्ल्यूसी के सुपुर्द किया और फिर बच्ची यहां एक केस के सिलसिले में बूंदी पहुंची।

- 3 साल में 30 से अधिक केस सामने आए : CWC

सीडब्ल्यूसी बूंदी अध्यक्ष सीमी शर्मा के अनुसार तीन वर्षों के दौरान 30 बच्चियों के केस सामने आ चुके हैं, जो इस देह व्यापार में लिप्त थी। इन बच्चियों ने बताया कि इनमें से सभी पर कर्ज व पूरे परिवार की भरण पोषण की जिम्मेदारी थी। इन बालिकाओं को लीज पर देने के बाद प्रतिदिन दुष्कर्म होता था। कई बार तो यह संख्या दोगुनी तक पहुंच जाती। समिति के पास औसत 13 एफआईआर आई हैं, जिनमें उन्होंने 17 गिरफ्तारियां करवाई हैं।

- शर्मनाक : बेटियों को पहली बार दलदल में धकेलने की भी बोली

सीडब्ल्यूसी के आंकड़ों के अनुसार यहां 6 वर्ष की बच्चियों को भी देह व्यापार के लिए लीज पर दिया जा रहा है। कुछ बच्चियों ने तो यहां तक बताया है कि जब उनके साथ पहली बार दुष्कर्म हुआ तो दलालों ने ग्राहक से 3 लाख तक लिए। इसके अलावा कई बच्चियों के साथ तो नशे में उनके साथ अमानवीय हरकतें भी हुई हैं। बूंदी सीडब्ल्यूसी के पास जो बच्चियां पहुंची उनको नागपुर पुणे, मुंबई, आगरा, ग्वालियर, सवाई माधोपुर, जोधपुर, झालावाड़, टोंक व जयपुर तक भेजा गया था।

- समाज की मुख्यधारा से भी जुड़ना चाहती हैं बच्चियां

कुछ सालों में बालिकाएं इस काम से निकल कर समाज की मुख्य धारा से जुड़ना चाहती हैं। परिवार के लोग परिवार व कर्ज का वास्ता देकर उन्हें देह व्यापार में धकेल देते हैं। यहां पंच पटेल व्यवस्था हैं, वह समाज के जड़ों में बैठी हुई है कर्जदार और अधिक कर्ज में डूबते जाते हैं। शिक्षा का प्रचार ही इन्हें इस दलदल से बाहर निकलने की एकमात्र संभावना प्रतीत होती है। हालत ये है कि 100 से अधिक नाबालिक बालिकाएं बूंदी जिले में और बूंदी से बाहर देह व्यापार के दलदल में फंसी है।



Chetan Dwivedi is a seasoned journalist with 17 years of experience, having worked across districts like Banswara, Nagaur, and Jaipur. He currently serves as an Investigation Reporter in Kota division.

VIII.

Resilience & Personal Triumph

Chronicling individual stories of overcoming immense adversity, stigma, and systemic neglect.

Behind every story of violence or neglect stands another — of someone who refused to break. This section gathers such stories of resistance: people who've faced trauma, stigma, and systemic failure, yet clawed back dignity on their own terms. These are not feel-good tales, but testaments to endurance — to what it takes to rebuild when the world looks away.

In *Triumph Over Trauma*, Shyamveer Singh and Nitin Sharma follow athletes Sonia Choudhari and Deepthi, who turned humiliation into victory. Documenting Conflict and Memory preserves what power prefers forgotten — like Rakhi Bose's account of Manipur's silenced survivors.

Together, they remind us that resilience isn't a virtue — it's an act of defiance.

Triumph Over Trauma: Stories of survival and reclaiming one's life.

1. **Shyamveer Singh** - Samaj ne dutkara, phir bhi antarrashtriya star par chamak bikher rahi Bharatpur ki para player Sonia Choudhari
2. **Nitin Sharma** - Taunted as a Child, Deepthi Strikes Gold at World Athletics

Documenting Conflict and Memory: Preserving narratives from regions of strife and historical trauma.

1. **Rakhi Bose** - Criminal Amnesia: Manipur Sexual Violence Survivors Face Erasure, Year After 'Viral Video'

समाज ने दुत्कारा, फिर भी अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर चमक बिखेर रही भरतपुर की पैरा प्लेयर सोनिया चौधरी - Para Athlete Sonia Chaudhary

By *Shyamveer Singh, ETV Bharat Rajasthan Team*

कुछ लोग अपनी कमियों को किस्मत मानकर समझौता नहीं करते बल्कि ताकत बनाकर इतिहास रच जाते हैं. ऐसी ही कहानी है भरतपुर की सोनिया की...

भरतपुर : 'खुदी को कर बुलंद इतना कि हर तकदीर से पहले खुदा बंदे से खुद पूछे बता तेरी रजा क्या है'. छोटे से गांव उसेर की बेटी और सांतरुक की बहू, सोनिया चौधरी ने अपने हौसले और मेहनत के बल पर इस कथन को चरितार्थ किया है. उन्होंने न केवल समाज की रूढ़ियों को तोड़ा है बल्कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय खेल मंच पर भारत का नाम भी रोशन किया. जन्म से दिव्यांग सोनिया ने हाल ही में कंबोडिया में आयोजित इंटरनेशनल पैरा थ्रो बॉल मैच सीरीज में भारत का प्रतिनिधित्व करते हुए गोल्ड मेडल हासिल किया. यह सीरीज कंबोडिया में 5 से 7 दिसंबर के बीच आयोजित हुई थी. सीरीज में शानदार प्रदर्शन के लिए उन्हें बेस्ट प्लेयर का खिताब भी मिला. अपनी मां के सपोर्ट से सोनिया आज अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर अपनी सफलता का परचम फहरा रही हैं.

दर्द और हौसले का बचपन : सोनिया का बचपन संघर्षों से भरा था. गांव के सामान्य बच्चों के साथ खेलने की उनकी इच्छा हर बार किसी के धक्के से खत्म हो जाती. समाज के लोगों ने उन्हें अक्षम कहकर ताने दिए. पिता ने भी निराशाजनक व्यवहार किया, लेकिन सोनिया की मां वीरमति ने हार नहीं मानी. उन्होंने अपनी बेटी का हौसला बढ़ाया और उसे पढ़ाई के लिए भरतपुर भेज दिया. सोनिया ने बताया कि बचपन में उन्हें बार-बार गिराया गया, लेकिन उनकी मां ने हमेशा उन्हें उठने का हौसला दिया. उनकी वजह से ही वो आज यहां हैं.

खेलों में कदम और प्रेरणा : सोनिया ने बताया कि उनकी खेलों की यात्रा तब शुरू हुई जब उन्होंने पैरालंपिक मेडलिस्ट देवेन्द्र झांझड़िया का साक्षात्कार पढ़ा. इससे प्रेरित होकर उन्होंने खेलों में अपना भविष्य बनाने का निर्णय लिया. भरतपुर के लोहागढ़ स्टेडियम में प्रशिक्षण के दौरान भी उन्हें कई बार समाज के ताने सुनने पड़े, लेकिन उन्होंने हार मानने के बजाय और मेहनत की. जयपुर के एसएमएस स्टेडियम में कोच नरेंद्र तोमर ने उन्हें 2 साल तक निःशुल्क प्रशिक्षण दिया, जिससे सोनिया की प्रतिभा को नई दिशा मिली.

चमक बिखेरती उपलब्धियां : सोनिया ने अपने जीवन की हर चुनौती को पीछे छोड़ते हुए कई राष्ट्रीय और अंतरराष्ट्रीय खिताब जीते हैं. उन्होंने 2017 में राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर शॉटपुट और डिस्कस थ्रो में गोल्ड मेडल जीता, 2018 में राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर सिल्वर मेडल जीता, 2020-2022 में पैरा एथलेटिक्स में कांस्य पदक जीता, श्रीलंका और बांग्लादेश टी-20 में भी विजेता रहीं. नेपाल में शॉटपुट और डिस्कस थ्रो में स्वर्ण पदक जीता, 2024 में कंबोडिया में इंटरनेशनल पैरा थ्रोबॉल मैच सीरीज में गोल्ड मेडल और बेस्ट प्लेयर का अवॉर्ड जीता.

परिवार का मजबूत सहारा : सोनिया की सफलता में उनके पति आरव कुंतल का भी बड़ा योगदान रहा. सोनिया ने बताया कि और कि जब वो खेल की प्रैक्टिस में व्यस्त होती हैं तो पति बेटी का पूरा ध्यान रखते हैं. पति का समर्थन उनकी सबसे बड़ी ताकत है. वहीं, ससुर हरि सिंह और सासु मां पार्वती देवी भी पूरा सहयोग करते हैं. संघर्ष कर अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर सफलता का परचम लहराने वाली सोनिया वर्तमान में जयपुर सचिवालय में यूडीसी के पद पर सेवारत हैं. सोनिया ने बताया कि उनका सपना है कि वे दिव्यांग बच्चों के लिए सहायता और प्रशिक्षण के माध्यम से उनके जीवन में बदलाव ला सकें. इसके लिए वो और उनके पति आरव कुछ दिव्यांग व अनाथ बच्चों को निःशुल्क भोजन, रहने की व्यवस्था, शिक्षा और खेलों की सुविधा उपलब्ध कराती हैं.



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Taunted for her features as a child, Deepthi Jeevanji, backed by Gopichand, strikes gold at World Athletics Para Championship

By Nitin Sharma, The Indian Express

Born with intellectual disability, the 20-year-old Deepthi from Andhra Pradesh broke the world record timing of 55.07 seconds in the women's T20 400m final in Kobe, also qualifying for the Paris Paralympics on Monday.

Deepthi Jeevanji set a world record timing of 55.07 seconds in the women's T20 400m final in Kobe, Japan on Monday, also qualifying for the Paris Paralympics. Deepthi Jeevanji set a world record timing of 55.07 seconds in the women's T20 400m final in Kobe, Japan on Monday, also qualifying for the Paris Paralympics.

When Deepthi Jeevanji won India's first gold medal at the World Athletics Para Championship in Kobe, Japan, her parents recalled how her unusual features at birth had prompted relatives and acquaintances to advise her parents to give up the child.

It was only later that Jeevanji Yadhagiri and Jeevanji Dhanalaxmi found out that their eldest child was born with intellectual disability, a cognitive disease hampering communication as well as adaptive skills. But there was only a feeling of pride on Monday morning, when the 20-year-old set a world record timing of 55.07 seconds in the women's T20 400m final, also qualifying for the Paris Paralympics.

Deepthi broke the earlier world record of 55.12 seconds set by USA's Breanna Clark. Aysel Onder of Turkey won the silver (55.19) while Lizanshela Angulo of Ecuador (56.68) won the bronze.

"She was born during the solar eclipse and her head was very small at birth along with the lips and nose being a bit unusual. Every villager who saw her and some of our relatives would call Deepthi pichi (mental) and kothi (monkey) and tell us to send her to an orphanage. Today, seeing her become the world champion in a far-off country proves that she is indeed a special girl," an emotional Dhanalaxmi told The Indian Express from village Kalleda in Warangal district of

Andhra Pradesh.

With the village's population of 5,000 mostly relying on cotton and mango farming, Yadhagiri relied on the family's half acre land apart from working as a labourer on other farms. It was on the death of his father Ramachandria that Yadhagiri had to sell his land.

"When my husband's father died, we had to sell the farm to make ends meet. My husband would earn Rs 100 or Rs 150 a day so there were days when I had to work to support our family, including Deepthi's younger sister Amulya. Deepthi was always a calm child and spoke very little. But when the village kids would tease her, she would come home and cry. So I would make her sweet rice or, on some days, chicken and that's what made her happy," remembers the mother.

It was in 2010 that Deepthi's talent as a runner was spotted by PT coach Biyani Venkateshwaralu at the Rural Development Foundation (RDF) School in the village. She would often outrace able-bodied students which prompted the coach got her enrolled for 100m and 200m training.

"When I first saw Deepthi, I was impressed by her strength and ability to run naturally. I had to run with her on the track to make her understand the idea of the running track. But she would not talk with anybody. She won the 100m at the state level but was disqualified for lane infringement. So we often had to have other kids running with her," Venkateshwaralu told The Indian Express.

Expert advice

It was during a 2019 state meet at Khammam where Deepthi caught the attention of Sports Authority of India coach N Ramesh. He visited her house to convince her parents to send her to the SAI Centre in Hyderabad for training.

"Her parents did not even have the bus fare to send her to Hyderabad. When she shifted here, it took me a lot of time to get her adjusted to training at the stadium. We would draw the track on paper and make her understand different tactics as well as the need to focus on competitors. A coach or fellow trainee would always be with her to make her comfortable. We had to deal with her like a child," says Ramesh.

It was national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand who saw Deepthi at a training session at the stadium and suggested to Ramesh to get her assessed at the National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities in Secunderabad. A three-day test was followed by her competing at the Para Nationals in Bhubaneswar and later going for the world categorisation of her special ability in Australia and Morocco at World Paralympic events with the help of Gopichand Mytrah Foundation.

“An athlete like her needs care mentally, emotionally and financially at every step of her journey. When the category assessment was to be done, the coaches made sure that it was done in time and she was ready to compete at the international level,” Gopichand said.

Deepthi would win the 400m gold at the World Para Grand Prix in Morocco and another title at the Para Oceania-Pacific Games in Australia. Last year, she won the 400m gold medal at the Asian Para Games in Hangzhou with a record time of 56.69 seconds.

“She has a calm mind and it makes our work as coaches easier too. She follows what we tell her and doesn’t complain about fatigue. We had devised a plan of sounding the whistle at every 100m to make her understand the tactics of each segment of a race,” says Ramesh.



Nitin Sharma, Assistant Editor (Sports) at The Indian Express, Chandigarh, has been with the paper since 2007, covering Olympic sports and cricket, and has earned multiple national journalism awards.

Manipur Sexual Violence Survivors Face Erasure, Year After ‘Viral Video’

By **Rakhi Bose**, *Outlook*

After the initial uproar over the many rapes during the violence between Kuki and Meitei communities in Manipur, investigations now seem to have hit the snooze button.

This is the cover story for Outlook’s 11 September 2024 magazine issue ‘Lest We Forget’. To read more stories from the issue, [click here](#)

Nineteen-year-old Angel* from Manipur is filled with terror every time she hears the revving of a car or spots one, especially if it’s a white four-by-four. She recalls how her attackers had come in white and purple Mahindra Bolero vehicles on May 15, 2023—a fortnight after ethnic clashes broke out between the Kukis and the Meiteis in Manipur—when she, a Kuki, was abducted from outside an ATM in East Imphal where she had gone to withdraw cash.

Then 18, Angel was assaulted all night by mobs comprising Meitei men and women before being gang raped by unidentified armed men. She did not tell anyone about her ordeal till July, when inside a relief camp in Kangpokpi district where she and her family had taken shelter, Angel came across “that horrible video”. Her eyes welled up and a sharp pain seared her chest as she watched the video of the two women being assaulted and paraded naked by a mob. Though she did not know the women, she knew instantly what they had gone through. “I decided to fight for justice, not just for me but for all the women who faced this trauma,” she says.

Justice, however, remains elusive even after a year of national protests, international outrage, political mudslinging and interventions by the Supreme Court and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). None of Angel’s attackers has been arrested or even identified. She isn’t the only one. A majority of the survivors of sexual violence or kin of victims from the tribal Kuki-Zo communities, disproportionately targeted in the ethnic clashes, have so far received no relief or reassurance.

As the country is yet again devastated by the recent rape-murder of a young trainee doctor inside the R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, the women who faced sexual violence amid the conflict, and their kin, are once again confronted with the spectre of their memories and myriad questions: how long would they have to wait for justice? And how many women would have to be sacrificed for the system to wake up?

Angel says that her abductors were armed Meiteis who beat her with the butts of their guns and took her over to women in Wangkhei district who too beat her late into the night before handing her over to “men in black T-shirts, armed with knives, guns and ropes”. These men came in packs driving white Boleros; they blindfolded and tied her and drove her at gunpoint to Langol and then to Bishnupur while repeatedly assaulting her and threatening to kill her. They eventually decided to take her to a nearby hilltop past Ngariyan Ching (hill) where they took turns raping her. Having passed out after repeated beatings on her head, Angel requested permission to urinate upon waking up and her attackers untied her hands. “I knew I just had that one shot. If I did not escape, I would be killed on this hill. So I decided to make a run for it,” Angel recalls a year later. She somehow managed to roll down the hill where she was eventually rescued by a Meitei Pangal Muslim vegetable vendor who was driving by. He hid her amid his stash of vegetables and transported her to Bishnupur police station, even as her assailants followed with guns. Once they reached the station, Angel claims that she told the officers that she was being chased by armed men in cars who belonged to Arambai Tengol, a militant Meitei group that has been named in almost all cases of violence since last year. But when questioned, the mobs told the police that they were just members of a “club”.

“When the police let them go, I realised I wasn’t safe there, as the cops were also Meiteis,” she recalls. The Bishnupur Police has since denied any report of Angel being taken to the station. The Muslim driver helped the girl contact her family and eventually dropped her off in the care of some people from her community. On May 18, Kuki civil society organisations (CSOs) arranged for her to be driven to Kangpokpi and admitted to the district hospital from where she was referred to a hospital in Kohima, Nagaland. Scans of records from the

hospital accessed by *Outlook* confirm “assault and rape on May 15, 2023, during the Manipur tribal clash”.

The teen now lives with her mother, father and elder brother in a rented flat in the middle of paddy fields enveloped by a ring of blue mountains. Having dropped out of school in class 8 due to health issues, Angel hopes to one day manage a small business to help out her mother, the only breadwinner in the house. For now, though, she remains in physical as well as mental pain. She has trouble eating solid food and gets intense migraines due to her severe head injuries. She does not like meeting anyone other than her family members and is often woken up by flashbacks when she goes to sleep.

About 100 km away, lack of anonymity due to the viral “naked parade” video has rendered the two Vaiphei community women isolated and deeply reclusive. With no homes left for them to return to, the two remain in Churachandpur with their families, trying to erase the memories of that day.

On May 4, a Meitei mob attacked B Phainom village where the women stayed, bordering East Imphal. The older survivor, in her 40s, is the wife of the village chief and related to the second survivor, who is 19 years old. After attacking the village, the mob began burning homes and beating the Kuki-Zo families. While the village chief managed to escape, his wife was left behind along with the 19-year-old and her father, brother and aunt. “The women along with some men ran and hid in a nearby bush. They would have escaped, had it not been for that miserable goat that got loose in the commotion and ran into the very bush behind which the group was hiding, leading the attackers to them,” says the village chief.

The incident has shaken them. “My wife does not talk much. She keeps to herself. We don’t bring up the incident at home,” the husband reiterates. He says that the children understand what happened but they too maintain silence. The mother of the 19-year-old, meanwhile, remains inconsolable. Her son and her husband, who were also hiding behind the bush, were killed by the mob while trying to protect the two women. “My daughter has to live with not just the memory of what happened to her, but also what happened to her brother and father. She watched them get killed,” she says.

Since the women are from the Vaiphei community, they are being protected by CSOs like the Zomi Council Steering Committee in Churachandpur who strictly supervise their care. “It becomes hard for them to deal with the memories that come flooding back every time they go online and see news about that video or reports about other brutal rape cases like the recent one in Kolkata. To protect them, we restrict their usage of social media,” a member of the Zillai (Vaiphei Students’ Organisation) related to the survivors says, adding that the community has ensured that the survivors receive proper medical care and mental health counselling.

“Fortunately or unfortunately, the video came out. It helped draw attention to the genocide that our people are facing, especially the atrocities against women,” says Kimneihoi Lhungdim, the general secretary of the Kuki Women Human Rights Organisation (KWHRO) in Lamka, the capital of Churachandpur district, which lies about 30 km from Meitei-dominated Bishnupur. A heavily militarised buffer zone and concertina wires divide the two areas, with the Kuki-Zo in the south-west of the state demanding a separate administration. “Separation is the only solution. It will also help us speed up the process of seeking justice for all the 203 Kuki-Zo victims who were killed in the violence, including 29 women,” says Haokip. “Thousands of women have also been displaced from their homes. They have lost their belongings, while hundreds have survived some form of abuse, violation or assault.”

At least 221 people have lost their lives since May 3 when violence erupted between the hill-dwelling Kuki-Zo tribes and the dominant Meitei community in Churachandpur over the Meitei’s demand to include the indigenous group in the Scheduled Tribes list. The conflict had been preceded by prolonged agitations by tribal groups against forest laws taking over tribal land and the persistent vilification and “otherisation” of the Kukis and illegal immigrants, militants, drug addicts or poppy cultivators.

The Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), the apex civil body of the Kukis, has been trying to provide relief and support to the thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who remain in relief camps across Churachandpur and Kangpokpi. Through programmes like

'Jangnadopna' implemented by its subsidiary arms like the KWHRO, the organisation has provided an ex-gratia amount of Rs 1 lakh to the kin of some of the victims, including the brother and father of the 19-year-old survivor in Churachandpur. An orphanage being managed by the Kuki Women's Union is currently providing a home to over 50 children who have lost both parents in the current conflict. The Kuki Students Organisation (KSO) and other bodies provide round-the-clock assistance and support to families and help maintain lines of communication. KIM President Ajang Khongsai says that while the community is doing all it can, the response of the courts, law enforcement agencies and the government has been less than adequate. "No compensation or rehabilitation schemes have yet been announced. Investigations in all the cases of violence and rioting have been slow and some haven't even begun. Even in the cases of violence against women, the intervention of the Supreme Court came only on July 20, after the video went viral," he says.

The Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance of the incident, and on August 7, transferred multiple cases, including the aforementioned cases and others to the CBI. It also set up Special Investigation Teams (SITs) to look into cases of violence and formed an all-women judicial panel to look into the nature of crimes against women in the conflict. In the order, a bench led by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, said, "In times of sectarian violence, mobs use sexual violence to send a message of subordination to the community that the victims or survivors hail from. Such visceral violence against women during conflict is nothing but an atrocity."

After the initial uproar, investigations now seem to have hit the snooze button. While the CBI is reportedly investigating 27 cases of violence, including 19 cases of crimes against women, the affected families don't have any updates. "The CBI spoke to me in October-November last year. Since then, we have not received any report from the CBI, the SIT, the Manipur Police or the Indian government," says the father of Flora*, who was gang raped and murdered inside a car wash in Imphal East along with another Kuki girl—her friend and colleague Leena*. The father does not know if a chargesheet has been filed. The family also claims that a recorded phone conversation between a colleague of Flora and Leena's roommate, in which the former intimidated the latter

of the alleged rape and murder of the two girls by Meitei gangs on May 4, was disregarded by the CBI when they informed the investigating officer about it. “We think they are trying to evade the rape charges,” says the father of the victim. The 56-year-old man and his wife have been displaced from their home and now live at a relative’s house in Kangpokpi. They listen to the recording on loop. They do not have anything to remember their daughter with, except for sketches of the eyebrows that she had been trying to master as part of her eyelash extension course. “She wanted to become a beautician,” Flora’s mother sighs, breaking down.

Angel and her family also do not know the status of her case and can barely afford her treatment. While a chargesheet has been filed in case of the Vaiphei women in Churachandpur, the trial has not yet started as the location of the trial has not yet been finalised. In March, the apex court had directed the Manipur government, the CBI and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to file status reports on the investigation and chargesheets filed in cases of violence to decide whether the trials can commence in Assam or be shifted to Manipur.

This year in July, some civil society groups quietly observed 20 years since the brutal rape and killing of Thangjam Manorama and the significant anti-rape protests led by a group of 12 Manipuri mothers belonging to the Meira Paibi, a civil society organisation of elderly Meitei women. Manorama was arrested by the Assam Rifles from her home at night allegedly on suspicion of her involvement with an insurgent group. The next day, her bullet-riddled body was found at the base of Ngariyan Ching. In protest, 12 elderly women of the Meira Paibi walked to Imphal’s Kangla Fort, holding banners imploring “Indian Army Rape Us” and stripped. “We were helpless at the time, we didn’t know how else to stop the madness that was unfolding in Manipur,” says Ima Ngambi, one of the 12 *Imas* (mothers) who led the nude protest. The rape and murder of Manorama, now infamous as one of the worst alleged cases of “fake encounters” recorded in India, remains unsolved, meaning that the fight was not yet over. “Our fight is not just for Manorama, but for all women, like the doctor raped in Kolkata, or even the women paraded naked in the viral video last year. That should not have happened,” says Ngambi, who is president of the Apunba Manipur Kanba Ima Lup. Yet, the Meira Paibi have been

named by all the complainants mentioned above as the perpetrators of violence and facilitators of sexual violence against them, bringing their role as bearers of the torch for women's empowerment under scrutiny.

"It was the Meira Paibi women who told us that we would be raped and killed because of rumours that Kukis were raping Meitei women in Churachandpur. The women, known for being peacekeepers for centuries, turned into perpetrators of violence," recalls Chin Sian Chiang, a former nursing student in Imphal who was dragged out of her college hostel along with another Kuki girl by a mob on May 4 last year, beaten and paraded down a road. Chiang realises with sadness that she escaped the fate that many of her fellow-survivors could not. The 23-year-old, who is currently recovering from her injuries in Churachandpur after receiving treatment at AIIMS last year, says that she is grateful to be alive. "It feels horrible to say this, but I think I got lucky," she says.

*(*Names have been changed to protect identity)*



Rakhi Bose is a Delhi-based multimedia journalist with a background of writing and reporting on gender, minority rights, identity politics and countercultures. She specialises in ground-reports and long-form features. Currently the Associate Editor (Op-ed) for The Quint.

<https://www.outlookindia.com/national/after-manipurs-deadly-ethnic-violence-rape-victims-find-not-closure-but-erasure>

SPECIAL AWARD WINNERS
BOOK WINNERS
ADVERTISING WINNERS
FILM & WEB SERIES WINNERS
OUR JURY

Special Award Winners

LAADLI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

MAHABANOO MODY-KOTWAL



Actor, director, producer, and tireless advocate for gender justice, Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal has, for over five decades, turned theatre into a space of resistance and renewal. From bringing Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* to India—breaking the silence around women's bodies and agency—to mentoring generations of women in theatre, she has fused art with activism. With passion, wit, and courage, she has challenged patriarchal taboos and redefined what it means to be a woman on and off the stage.

LAADLI GENDER CHAMPION AWARD

JYOTI MHAPSEKAR



Pioneering feminist thinker, theatre activist, and founder of Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Jyoti Mhapsekar has dedicated her life to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Through her powerful street plays, writings, and grassroots initiatives, she has given voice to the struggles and aspirations of working-class women, linking art with social change. Her work continues to inspire generations to question inequality and reimagine a more just and inclusive world.

LAADLI RURAL FEMINIST AWARD

INDAVI TULPULE



Indavi Tulpule has dedicated her life to empowering rural and tribal women in Thane through Shramik Mukti Sanghatna, addressing gender inequality, women's rights, education, and economic empowerment. She has mobilised communities to challenge patriarchal norms, foster leadership, and create sustainable platforms for collective action, demonstrating the transformative power of grassroots activism.

LAADLI THEATRE AWARD



SARITA JOSHI

A legendary actor with over six decades in theatre and TV, Sarita Joshi has brought rare depth and authenticity to the stage. From Gujarati theatre to national acclaim, she has portrayed women of strength, complexity, and grace, using her art to reflect and reshape social realities.

LAADLI WOMAN BEHIND THE SCREEN AWARD

NAMRATA RAO

One of India's most acclaimed film editors, Namrata Rao has shaped the language of contemporary cinema with her sharp intuition and narrative finesse. From *Kahaani* and *Band Baaja Baaraat* to *Oppenheimer* (India trailer) and *Monica, O My Darling*, her work blends precision with emotional rhythm, giving each story its pulse and power. Her craft exemplifies how women behind the screen redefine storytelling in Indian cinema.



Advertising Award Winners

WINNER | CAMPAIGN

BUBBLEWRAP FILMS

STAR SPORTS | JERSEY WAHI TOH JAZBA WAHI



Jersey Wahi Toh Jazba Wahi celebrates women's cricket by featuring female cricketers' names on India team jerseys, championing equal recognition, inspiring fans, and highlighting the talent, dedication, and spirit of women athletes across the country.

WINNER | CSR

OGILVY

TITAN COMPANY | AAGE BADHEGI | #MOTHERSDAY



Titan's CSR initiative extends its mission of educating underprivileged girls to also empower mothers, celebrating the transformative power of maternal support. The campaign combines the warmth of a mother's love with the timeless Titan tune to inspire and uplift communities.

WINNER | CSR

OGILVY

NANHI KALI | LESSONS FROM A FOOTBALL



Nanhi Kali's campaign goes beyond classroom education for underprivileged girls, using sports to teach resilience, teamwork, and self-belief. Through the story of a simple football, the initiative conveys that the most important lesson for every girl is discovering her own strength.

WINNER | PRODUCT

P se PICTURE

SABHYATA | #CELEBRATINGMOTHERHOOD



Sabhyata's campaign highlights the often-overlooked challenges women face around childbirth and maternity leave, calling attention to the urgent need for maternity rooms and supportive workplaces. The film continues the brand's commitment to celebrating women and fostering gender-sensitive workplace practices.

WINNER | PRODUCT

NIRVANA FILMS

VINSMERA JEWELS | TRULY IRRESISTIBLE



This campaign breaks stereotypes by celebrating joy, self-expression, and inclusivity, featuring superstar Mohanlal trying on jewellery. It challenges conventional gender norms while making the case that elegance and desire transcend traditional boundaries.

WINNER | SERVICE

IDEAZ FARM

MYNTRA | #FASHIONKIADALAT | NO JUDGEMENT



Myntra's campaign celebrates individuality by challenging judgment of personal fashion choices. Written in the language of youth and enlivened by Archana Puran Singh as the judge, it delivers a bold, fun, and empowering message about self-expression.

CONSISTENT GENDER ADVOCATE

TANISHQ



Tanishq has continually championed gender-sensitive advertising, bringing nuanced conversations about women's choices, individuality, and equality into public consciousness. From celebrating her decisions in *Rivaah / Everything Changes? Some Yours, Some Ours*, to highlighting shared responsibilities in marriage, and promoting gender-equal inheritance in *Brothers, Written By Sisters / Raksha Bandhan*, the brand has consistently celebrated women's agency with sensitivity and creativity.

GRAND PRIX

DDB MUDRA GROUP

STAYFREE | #BETASTAYFREELEAANA



Stayfree's campaign takes a bold step in normalising conversations around menstruation, encouraging families—especially boys—to support girls in managing periods. By promoting awareness, empathy, and behavioural change, it drives a meaningful cultural shift in attitudes toward menstruation.

Book Award Winners

BOOK | ENGLISH | MEMOIR

DEVIKA VR

'RUKMINI DEVI ARUNDALE: ARTS REVIVALIST AND INSTITUTION BUILDER' | NIYOGI BOOKS PRIVATE LIMITED



Devika VR's *Rukmini Devi Arundale: Arts Revivalist and Institution Builder* offers a compelling portrait of the visionary who transformed India's cultural landscape. Tracing her role in reviving Bharatanatyam and founding Kalakshetra, the book celebrates Rukmini Devi's enduring legacy as an artiste, educator, and institution builder

BOOK | ENGLISH | NON-FICTION

NEHA BHAT

UNASHAMED: NOTES FROM THE DIARY OF A SEX THERAPIST | HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS INDIA

In *Unashamed: Notes from the Diary of a Sex Therapist*, Neha Bhat offers a candid, compassionate exploration of sexuality, healing, and self-acceptance. Drawing from her work as a therapist, she dismantles stigma and shame with warmth and insight, inviting readers to embrace their bodies, desires, and stories without apology. Published by HarperCollins India, this book is both deeply personal and powerfully liberating



BOOK | ENGLISH | TRANSLATION | FICTION

SANDHYA MARY

MARIA JUST MARIA TRANSLATED BY JAYASREE KALATHIL | HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS INDIA



Maria, Just Maria by Sandhya Mary, translated by Jayasree Kalathil, is a powerful work of fiction that gives voice to a woman's defiance and desire for freedom in a world that seeks to confine her. With lyrical precision and emotional depth, the novel captures Maria's journey of selfhood and survival. Published by HarperCollins India, it stands as a bold testament to the strength and spirit of women's inner worlds

BOOK | ENGLISH | TRANSLATION | NON - FICTION

JEEVASUNDARI BALAN

THE LIFE AND WORK OF MOOVALUR RAMAMIRTHAM AMMAIYAR TRANSLATED BY V BHARTHI HARIDSHANKAR | ZUBAAN PUBLISHERS

This biography traces the extraordinary life of Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar (1883–1962), one of Tamil Nadu's foremost social reformers. Sold into the Devadasi system as a child, she transformed her suffering into a fearless fight for women's emancipation, education, and equality. Through Jeevasundari's narrative and V's translation, the book explores themes of gender, caste, and resistance, portraying Ramamirtham Ammaiyar as a woman who redefined womanhood—from ritual servitude to political agency. Both a feminist and historical document, it reclaims the legacy of a reformer whose voice continues to inspire struggles for justice today.



BOOK | ENGLISH | FICTION

SHINIE ANTONY

EDEN ABANDONED: THE STORY OF LILITH | HACHETTE INDIA



In *Eden Abandoned: The Story of Lilith*, Shinie Antony reimagines the myth of Adam's first wife, casting Lilith as a woman who refuses submission and chooses freedom over paradise. With lyrical prose and psychological depth, the novel explores desire, defiance, and the cost of autonomy. Published by Hachette India, it is a bold, imaginative retelling that reclaims one of mythology's most misunderstood women.

BOOK | ENGLISH | JURY APPRECIATION CITATION

SHINIE ANTONY

HELL HATH NO FURY | HACHETTE INDIA

In *Hell Hath No Fury*, Shinie Antony presents a gripping collection of stories that probe the dark, tender, and resilient corners of womanhood. With sharp insight and unflinching honesty, she captures women's rage, vulnerability, and grace in the face of betrayal and constraint. Published by Hachette India, this powerful volume affirms Antony's mastery in portraying the emotional truths of women's lives.



BOOK | MARATHI | NON- FICTION

PRAVEEN GODESHWAR

GUTENBURG CHYA SAAVALYA | BHAGYASHREE PRAKASHAN



गुटेनबर्गच्या सावल्या (*Gutenberg Chya Savlya*) is a landmark Marathi work that brings together, for the first time, the stories and contributions of women publishers across India in a single, accessible volume. More than an extension of a newspaper column, it stands as an important act of feminist documentation—preserving a vital chapter of history and illuminating the women who shaped India’s publishing landscape:

Film & Web Series Award Winners



BEST REGIONAL FILM

STHAL

MARATHI | JAYANT SOMALKAR

Set in rural Maharashtra, *Sthal* lays bare the ritualised commodification of young women through the practice of bride-viewing. Through the eyes of 16-year-old Savita, the film captures the quiet violence of patriarchy that renders girls voiceless, valued only as objects of barter under the guise of custom. With restraint and empathy, Jayant Somalkar crafts a deeply unsettling narrative that transforms an everyday ritual into a mirror reflecting systemic gender inequality.



BEST LGBTQIA+ FILM

KUCH SAPNEY APNE

HINDI | SRIDHAR RANGAYAN & SAAGAR GUPTA

Kuch Sapney Apne is a tender, quietly powerful exploration of love, identity, and acceptance within the LGBTQIA+ community. Set in everyday India, it portrays queer lives with honesty and warmth—eschewing melodrama for authenticity. With gentle storytelling and deep empathy, the film celebrates the courage to dream, love, and live on one's own terms.



BEST WEB SERIES

DUPAHIYA

HINDI | SONAM NAIR | AMAZON PRIME VIDEO

Dupahiya turns the disappearance of a motorbike into a sharp, darkly humorous lens on patriarchy in rural India. The vehicle's dowry-like symbolism exposes how women continue to be bound by transactional marriages. The series also deftly interrogates colourism. Witty yet empathetic, it dissects the everyday absurdities of patriarchy while affirming women's resilience and agency.

Our Jury

1. **Akhileshwari Ramagoud** - Journalist with over 30 years at *Deccan Herald*, acclaimed Washington-based foreign correspondent, and recipient of the Telangana Government's Best Woman Journalist award.
2. **Alka Dhupkar** - Senior Assistant Editor at *TOI Plus*, this journalist's incisive reporting spans gender, politics, rural Maharashtra, and urban poverty. A recipient of the Ramnath Goenka, Chameli Devi Jain, and multiple *Laadli* Awards, she is known for blending rigorous investigation with deep social insight and innovative storytelling.
4. **Ammu Joseph** - Independent journalist and author for nearly five decades, this pioneering voice on gender, media, and culture has penned six acclaimed books and held founding roles in the Network of Women in Media, India, and leading media schools.
5. **Anuja Gulati** - A development professional with over 30 years in gender and rights, Gulati is a Programme Management Specialist at UNFPA India. She has spent more than two decades at UNFPA, leading training and policy initiatives on genderbased sex selection, sexual harassment, and inclusive reproductive health.
5. **Arathi P M** - Director of the School of Gender Studies at Mahatma Gandhi University, specialising in public health law, gender justice, and feminist research methodology.
6. **Aritra Bhattacharya** - This journalist-researcher has reported on human rights for leading national outlets. A doctorate on interdisciplinary study of Maharashtra's *shahiri* tradition, he has researched on bonded labour and digital technologies.
7. **Asha Matale** - For over three decades in leading Marathi and national media, this seasoned journalist has specialised in

politics, health, and editorial strategy. A *Saamana* columnist and multilingual editor, she has covered landmark elections and now teaches at the University of Mumbai

8. **Barkha Dutt** - This award-winning journalist, author, and TV anchor for 30 years in broadcast/digital media, is known for fearless reporting and incisive commentary which shapes national conversations on politics, gender, and social change
9. **Bisakha Dutta** - This feminist digital rights advocate, leads the non-profit Point of View and co-founded the award-winning *Deep Dives*. She channels her journalistic and filmmaking skills to pioneer research on digital obscenity and serves on global boards like Wikimedia Foundation.
10. **Dr. Daya Krishna Mangal** - This medicine post-grad with over 40 years of experience in public health, currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, USA.
11. **Divya Gupta** - This communications specialist and former journalist with 25 years of experience, is a senior consultant with the World Bank, India. An award-winning journalist, she has led communications for WHO and UN Women and holds advanced degrees from Columbia and John Hopkins.
11. **Deepa Gahlot** – National awardee critic, columnist, and author writes on cinema, theatre, the arts, and women’s issues for leading publications and *deepagahlot.com*, she has edited several cinema journals and authored books like *The Prithviwallahs*, *Take 2*, *Sheroes*, apart from biographies of Shah Rukh Khan and Shammi Kapoor.
11. **Dolly Thakore** - This TV anchor, commentator and columnist is a Communication & PR consultant, author, associate publisher, editor, casting director, and actor among other things.
14. **Dr. Malti Mehta** - A seasoned media professional, educator, and filmmaker, she has shaped media education in Gujarat. She leads

initiatives at Gujarat University and the Ahmedabad Management Association while advancing women's representation and gender policy in the state.

15. **Dr. Minaxi Shukla** - This child rights advocate and co-founder of CHETNA, now consults for "Promoting Learning for Life." She advises government and civil society on child health, nutrition, and education, including as State Consultant for UNICEF and the Government of Bihar.
15. **Dr. Pam Rajput** - This Padmashri awardee academic and feminist-activist, renowned for advancing gender equity headed a national panel on women's status.
17. **Dr. Sindhu Manjesh** - An independent writer, editor, researcher, and media scholar, she is both a Fulbright Fellow and Chevening Scholar with over two decades of global experience as a journalist and academic..
18. **Dr. Shefali Roy** - This distinguished professor with nearly three decades of experience, specialises in gender and political sociology. As former Head of Department and Director at Patna University, she has authored several influential works on women's rights.
19. **Ena Singh** - For over two decades, Singh served as Assistant Representative at UNFPA India, leading programmes on gender, reproductive health, and population issues. Her pioneering work on gender-biased sex selection is widely recognised.
20. **Gita Aravamudan** - Pioneering journalist and Bangalore's first woman reporter, Aravamudan tackles critical social issues in her non-fiction, including *Baby Makers* and *Disappearing Daughters*. Her bestselling *ISRO: A Personal History* and work on *KGF* further showcase her compelling storytelling.
21. **Gitali Vinayak** - Chief Editor, Miloon Saryajani, a Marathi magazine and a social activist.

22. **Gokul Krishnamoorthy** - This Independent Content Consultant and Marketing Columnist with over two decades of experience spanning events, PR, journalism, and brand strategy, has written and served in senior editorial roles across *Campaign India*, *The Hindu Businessline*, and *The Times Group* and has authored books on advertising and marketing.
23. **GOVIND CHATURVEDI** - A veteran journalist, Associated with Dainik Navjyoti, UNI, Rajasthan Patrika.
24. **Gourahari Das** -Distinguished Odia author and rare two-time Sahitya Akademi awardee, Das has over 75 books to his name. He led media as Principal of the Sambad School of Media and Culture and guided seminal cultural institutions like the theatre group Satabdira Kalakar.
25. **Jyotsna Habibullah** - Climate leader and CEO of Lucknow Farmers Market, Habibullah uses her marketing expertise to connect farmers and artisans with conscious consumers. She champions women's empowerment and drives climate action by reducing carbon footprints and promoting ecological restoration.
26. **Kanchan Mathur** - Ex-officiating director at IDSJ, Jaipur until 2018 and Professor (Honorary) until 2023.
27. **Kanchan Srivastav** - Senior Editor at Exchange4media Group with 16 years of experience at Times Group, Zee Group, and Free Press Journal.
28. **Kankshi Netri** - Founder of NETRI Foundation and policy researcher. Recognised for championing women's rights and driving technology-based political opportunities in India.
29. **Karishma Dolasha** - This dedicated Sociology educator and subject expert integrates real-world perspectives into learning, combining research-driven teaching with a commitment to holistic student growth.

30. **Kunal Purohit** - This award-winning journalist and documentary-maker has spent two decades investigating development and inequality. His recent focus on hate crimes and Hindu nationalism, culminated in the acclaimed book *H-Pop*.
30. **KV Sridhar** - KV Sridhar aka “Pops,” is a celebrated Indian advertising creative director and founder of Hyper Collective. With nearly 40 years in the industry, he has won 23 Cannes Lions and over 400 awards globally
32. **Lakshmi Lingam** - A distinguished gender and media scholar with over three decades of experience, she served as Dean at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Specialising in women’s studies, public health, and digital citizenship, she has held prestigious fellowships, including two Fulbright awards.
33. **Leena Pujari** - This feminist-sociologist who heads the Sociology Department at Mumbai’s K C College, specialises in Gender Studies, feminist pedagogy, and jurisprudence.
34. **Meena Karnik** - A veteran journalist of 40 years, Karnik co-edits the award-winning *Akshar*, has authored and translated over ten books on cinema and Hindi film romance, and serves as an international film critic and jury member at festivals including Ankara and Kerala.
35. **Meera Sundarajan** - This Chennai-based social development professional with 30+ years of experience is a TISS Social Work post-grad who has worked on economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and disaster management, shaping programmes and policy across multiple states.
36. **Mitali Parekh** - This versatile editorial professional since 2000, has served as the Gender and Sexuality editor for *DNA* and a Contributing Editor for *Sunday Mid-Day*, with her incisive writing on gender, mental health, and urban life featured in publications like *The Guardian*, *Caravan*, and *Scroll.in*.

36. **Mohammed Khan** - Mohammed Khan is the Indian advertising legend who set up some of the country's best agencies, including Contract, Rediffusion and Enterprise Nexus.
38. **Nilesh Dhotre** - This Delhi-based journalist has 18 years of experience across TV, radio, and digital media. He leads planning and commissioning for BBC News Marathi, specialising in political analysis and human-interest stories that amplify underrepresented voices, particularly within the LGBTQIA+ community.
39. **Pamela Philipose** - This veteran journalist and author is the ombudsperson for *The Wire* and former Editor-in-Chief of the Women's Feature Service, with a career spanning senior editorial roles at *The Indian Express* and acclaimed books on media, politics, and society.
40. **Pratima Joshi** - Writer and social activist for over 30 years, this award-winning investigative journalist has authored short stories, edited two non-fiction books, and actively supports multiple non-profit organisations
41. **Prof. Shobhita Rajagopal** - This retired feminist-researcher from the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur spent three decades advancing gender equity. Her work on women's rights, education, and health has shaped policy and practice across India and South Asia.
42. **Radhika Bordia** - Senior journalist with over 30 years' experience, Bordia shaped long-form programming at NDTV, including *24 Hours*, *Witness*, and *India Matters*. She reports on development, identity, and gender at the grassroots and directs the Delhi programme at the Missouri School of Journalism
43. **Rajan Mahan** - This distinguished NDTV journalist for over two decades, is now a reputed journalism professor and socio-political commentator, blending reporting with academic insight through his books, columns, and media analysis.

44. **Ranjona Banerji** - With over 40 years in media, Banerji has worked across advertising and publications like *India Today*, *Mid-Day*, *The Times of India*, and *DNA*. Based in Dehradun for the past 11 years, this independent journalist covers media, politics, gender, and is actively involved in local environmental issues.
45. **Richa S Mukherjee** - This TEDx speaker, award-winning author, ex-journalist, and advertising professional's novels—set in small-town India—blend humour, heart, and social insight. Author of *Kanpur Khoofiya Pvt. Ltd.*, *The Curse of Kuldhara*, and *Vigil-Aunties*, she also writes for leading publications.
45. **Revathi Sivakumar** - This journalist, writer, and poet whose work for national and international publications explores developmental, social, and political issues, often seeks the profound meaning held within the spaces between words.
47. **Revati Laul** – This independent journalist, filmmaker, and author of *The Anatomy of Hate*, who has reported for *NDTV*, *Tehelka*, and *Hindustan Times* is the Director of Sarfaroshi Foundation.
48. **Sandeep Sahu** - This journalist with over 40+ years of experience, is a seasoned BBC correspondent and political columnist for platforms like OTV and *Sambad*. He has authored President Droupadi Murmu's biography for Penguin and produces content in Odia, Hindi, and English, including his own YouTube show.
49. **Satyavathi Kondaveeti** - Women's rights activist and founder Editor of the first feminist magazine in Andhra Pradesh – 'Streevada Patrika' – Bhumika in 1993
49. **Sathya Saran** - Sathya Saran is a Consulting Editor at Penguin Random House India, former Femina Editor, author, fashion journalism lecturer at NIFT, stage actor, and curator of *The Spaces Between Words*.
51. **Saumya Baijal** - This feminist bilingual writer-poet is a storyteller, radio presenter, theatre artist, guest lecturer, and activist..

52. **Shahina KK** - Recipient of the 2023 International Press Freedom Award, she is Senior Editor at *Outlook* with 27 years of experience across television, print, and digital media, reporting on human rights, public health, gender, caste, and politics.
53. **Shefali Chaturvedi** - An award-winning audio professional and communication consultant with 20 years' experience, she has led media and humanitarian initiatives with WHO and BBC Media Action.
54. **Shrirang Khataavkar** - This versatile Marathi theatre professional—actor, voice artist, writer, and director—began as an IT professional in the mid-90s and briefly explored the food industry before establishing his niche in theatre and on screen. He is celebrated for his inclusive, gender-equality advocacy.
55. **Sohit Mishra** - This fearless independent journalist, spent over seven years at NDTV before leaving mainstream media to launch his own channel. His work spans groundbreaking COVID coverage and political reporting which reaches thousands.
56. **Sudhir Mishra** - Currently serves as Resident Editor at *Navbharat Times*, Delhi, with over 25 years of journalism experience at renowned publications like *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Bhaskar*.
56. **Sudipta Basu** - Currently Senior Editor at *Hindustan Times*, this seasoned journalist has held key editorial roles at *The Telegraph*, *MidDay*, *Mumbai Mirror* and *The Indian Express*.
58. **Suneeta Rao** - The Indipop Icon known for '*Paree Hoon Main*,' boasts a 40-year career in music and theatre, with five Indipop albums, and a prominent *LAADLI* spokesperson in Indian entertainment.
59. **Sunny Sebastian** - This journalist and political commentator is the founder vice-chancellor of Haridev Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication.

60. **Supriya Sharma** - This Executive Editor of Scroll.in who champions independent digital journalism recipient of both the Ramnath Goenka Award and the Chameli Devi Jain Award. She has over two decades of experience in covering politics, conflict and development.
61. **Teresa Rehman** - An award-winning journalist, author, and media educator based in northeast India.
62. **Usha Thorat** - Former Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and a champion of financial inclusion.
63. **Vanaja C** - Award-winning journalist, TV presenter, and filmmaker.
64. **Vasanthi Hariprakash** - This awardwinning journalist, radio & TV anchor, and founder of Pickle Jar Media has had a career spanning print, radio and TV—including NDTV 24x7 and BBC World News. She now focuses on storytelling, media training and creating platforms for underrepresented voices
65. **Vidyotama Sharma** - This journalist and content strategist now applies her extensive experience as Founder & CEO of the *Only Women* community and her content agency. Having led launches for top media houses and corporate initiatives, she is a sought-after moderator, speaker, and trainer.
65. **Vikrant Pande** - A translator of 12 Marathi classics into English, this polyglot awardee author, and former corporate professional is a renowned expert on Indian brand leadership and consumer insights.
67. **Vinaya Deshpande** - This senior journalist specialises in gendersensitive reporting, and investigative work on issues such as workplace sexual harassment. She has held leadership roles in major Indian news organisations and is a Chevening Fellow and former IVLP participant
68. **Yasim Sait** - This professional has leveraged her expertise of three decades in retail and entertainment, as an author, life purpose coach, and founder of a finishing school to empower.

About UNFPA



UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is the sexual and reproductive health agency of the UN. It works to uphold the rights and choices of women, girls and young people across more than 150 countries. Our aim is to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person can fulfil their potential.

Website- <https://india.unfpa.org/>

UN heard,
written,
told...

In a world that prefers women's truths softened, silenced, or forgotten, Unheard, Unwritten, Untold... refuses to look away. It gathers voices long pushed to the periphery—women who till fields and fight battles, who nurture and negotiate, who rage and rise. Within these pages live stories of quiet courage and searing resistance, of everyday survival and extraordinary strength. They speak of hands that build economies yet go unseen, of bodies that bear both life and violence, of dreams that persist despite everything. Each narrative is a heartbeat—fierce, fragile, unyielding—echoing across borders, castes, and genders. This anthology is not merely a collection of writings; it is a collective act of remembrance and rebellion, a testament to those who have always spoken—even when the world refused to listen. Here, at last, their truths are heard, written, and told.

- Yogesh Pawar



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Celebrate Women's Life

An initiative by Population First

