

Urdhva Mula



उर्ध्व मूलः

(Roots Upwards)



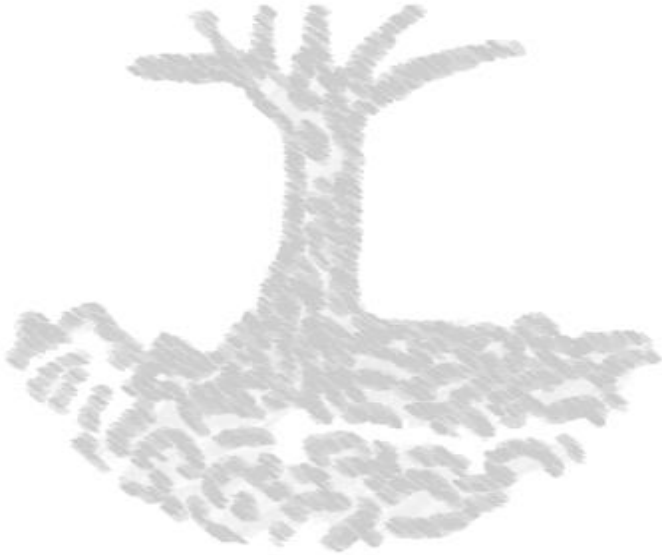
An Interdisciplinary Peer-Reviewed Annual Journal  
Focusing on Women and Related Issues

Vol.17

November 2024

***Urdhva Mula***  
**(Roots Upwards)**

**An Interdisciplinary Women's Studies Journal**



The motto “*Urdhva Mula*” i.e. roots upwards. Two simple words, which can instil hope and courage when faced with various life challenges.

(From *The Bhagavad Gita*)

**CONTENTS**

**EDITORIAL**

**ARTICLES**

<b>Women’s Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region – Opportunities and Challenges</b>	7
- Dr. Chitra Sinha	
<b>Gender, Internal Migration in the Cities and Urbanisation in India: Learnings of the Pandemic Triggered Lockdown</b>	22
- Prof. Vibhuti Patel	
<b>Gender Socialization in Urban Bangalore: Understanding Dynamics and Implication</b>	44
- Dr. Kanchana Goudar	
<b>Locating the Desire and Experience of Indian Women Through Representation in Writings: Anita Desai, Easterine Iralu, Shobha De</b>	61
- Manaswini Dwibedi	
<b>Re-Visiting the Partition Literature from The Margin: A Study of Namasudra Life Narrative</b>	68
- Subhamitra Adhikari	
<b>Challenging Dominance Through Voice in Cyberspace: A Study of Children of Sex Workers in G.B Road, Delhi</b>	79
- Dr. Ashwinder Kaur	
<b>Breaking Taboos: Menstruation in Contemporary Hindi Films</b>	100
- Dr. Padmini Jain	
<b><u>STUDENTS/LEARNERS SECTION</u></b>	
<b>Gender and Economy</b>	109
- Shriya Bhatia	

**BOOK REVIEW**

<i>Demystifying and Dignifying Singlehood: Life Journeys of Single Women Across the Globe</i>	126
- Dr Swati Partani	
<i>Gender and Mental Health – Combining Theory and Practice</i>	135
- Dr. Cicilia Chettiar	
<i>Transforming Masculinities: A Guide to Engage Men and Boys for Gender Justice</i>	143
- Prof. Vibhuti Patel	
<i>Empowering Women: Reflections and Trajectories</i>	145
- Dr. Vaishali Ojha	
<i>Antarangatil Katha: The Stories Within</i>	149
- Cicilia Chettiar	

**REPORT**

The Changemakers: SuPoshan Sanginis at the SuPoshan Project	160
- Kavita Sardana	

**STATEMENT**

• Solidarity Statement with Palestine	171
• AIDWA Demands Strong Action against Prajwal Revanna	173
• Open Letter to NCW	175
• Citizens Speak Out Against Brutal Cases of Sexual Violence	178
• Letter to National Medical Commission demanding	181
• An Open Letter to CJI on RG Kar Rape and Murder	184

- 
- The Pushback on Women’s Rights Must be Stopped 189

**OBITUARIES**

Dr. Bhargavi Dawar 193

Adv. Ketaki Rege 196

Dr. Mohini Giri 198

Prof. Suma Chitnis 200

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**List of Publications of Sophia Centre for Women’s Studies & Development**

## **EDITORIAL**

Dear friends,

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, remains a cornerstone in the global effort to advance gender equality. The unprecedented participation of grassroots women from 195 countries during this conference influenced the creation of the most comprehensive blueprint for gender equality. Its 12 Critical Areas of Concern have since shaped global and national gender policies, advocacy, and legislation.

As we approach the 30th anniversary of this historic document, the women's movement has begun the exercise of **revisiting and re-envisioning** the BPfA, especially with the next generation in mind. Not only do the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on its foundation, but the recently adopted Pact for the Future further reaffirms the global commitment to gender equality. Over the last 3 decades, In India, the BPfA has had a visible impact on legislation, policy reforms, and activism. However, despite significant progress, many challenges remain. Progressive laws exist, but enforcement remains inconsistent, and deep-seated gender stereotypes still hinder comprehensive progress. Currently, the national, regional, and global consultations are happening in full swing. The Urdhva Mula team expresses its solidarity and support for this sincere effort.

For the Past 22 Years, *Urdhva Mula* has been making consistent efforts to mainstream gender equality in higher education institutions by capturing discourses in women's studies and women's movement in the contemporary context. Continuing this crucial legacy, the 17<sup>th</sup> Volume has included articles that are marked by primary data collection, content analysis, review of state of the art in academic discourses, important concerns of the local-national-global women's rights movement and #inMemoria of the veteran feminists.

Thematic areas of gendered challenges for women entrepreneurs, the existential crisis faced by migrant women during the coronavirus pandemic

triggered lockdown, multiple marginalities and intersectional vulnerabilities in the process of urbanisation, coping strategies of children of sex workers in the era of information technology and menstrual taboos are analysed in the articles.

Books chosen for reviews cover vital areas of Demystifying and Dignifying Singlehood, Gender and mental health, Transforming Masculinities, multifaceted aspects of empowerment of women, in-depth profiles of waste managers and their trials and tribulations.

Grounded research-based “The Changemakers: *SuPoshan Sanginis* at the *SuPoshan* Project” makes a convincing case for upscaling and replication of this model in the context of malnutrition and nutritional deficiency faced by a large number of women and children. At the same time, makes us understand the need for social security and social protection of health care workers.

Statements by women’s rights organisations on global geopolitical concerns and issues of national significance capture the pulse of transnational feminist solidarity.

*Urdhva Mula* team offers respectful tributes to Dr. Bhargavi Dawar, Ketaki Rege, Dr. Mohini Giri and Prof. Suma Chitnis by profiling their valuable contributions to gender equality.

The *Urdhva Mula* invites researchers, academicians, scholars, policymakers, practitioners to send their original research-based articles and book reviews, poems, and statements with a special focus on gender concerns.

**Prof. Vibhuti Patel**

**Dr. (Sr.) Ananda Amritmahal**

## **ARTICLES**

### **Women's Entrepreneurship in the MENA Region – Opportunities and Challenges**

- Dr. Chitra Sinha

#### **Introduction**

In recent years, the world has witnessed a remarkable upsurge in women's empowerment, propelled by the international adoption of a gender-sensitive policy framework and enabling legislation by countries empowering and integrating women in the socio-economic sphere. As nations embarked on landmark legislation to remove gender discrimination, public policy to support women's empowerment and enabling legal frameworks have emerged as the primary instruments in ensuring gender justice. Many governments have demonstrated strong commitment through actions and policies to foster a responsive justice system that advances women's equal rights, opportunity and participation. At the same time, women around the world are more prepared to benefit from these opportunities due to growing education in an interconnected global economy. Increased globalisation and the infusion of new technologies such as digital commerce and cloud computing have removed traditional constraints faced by women in terms of maintaining a balance between work and family commitments. This has resulted in a much larger segment of women entering the workforce and assuming the role of entrepreneurs. Digitalisation fosters entrepreneurship expansion into new markets, creating a positive feedback loop.

The new economic and policy environment has bestowed women entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North Africa region with a great opportunity in recent years. The World Economic Forum notes that increased female participation in the workforce could add \$2.7 trillion to the region's economy by 2025 and a growing trend of female entrepreneurship could be a game changer for job creation and the expansion of workforces (World Economic Forum, 2023). The share of women in professional and technical jobs, led by female entrepreneurs is expected to double by 2030. Unlocking the full potential of



women entrepreneurs in the MENA region has thus come to the forefront of social and economic policy in the region.

A wide range of policy initiatives have been launched in MENA countries, with varied degrees of success. The Kingdom of Bahrain for instance, supported female-led start-ups through a variety of initiatives. The Kingdom's "National Plan for the Advancement of Bahraini Women" has the mandate to enable women to "contribute to development, forming an equal partnership in building a sustainable competitive community". It also has an initiative named "Riyadat Financing", which is a \$100 million fund aimed at women majority-owned start-ups and SMEs. The Riyadat program is a collaboration between Tamkeen, the Supreme Council for Women and Bahrain Development Bank to provide access to Sharia-compliant financing for Bahraini women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses by providing the tools they need to succeed. According to recent statistics, more than 332 women-owned businesses benefitted from the fund in areas such as the sale of pharmaceutical and medical commodities, travel agencies, construction, event management, day-care centres and nurseries. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is collaborating with the University of Texas at Austin to provide a mentoring platform for female entrepreneurs, while the UAE's Gender Balance Council has a specific remit to increase female representation on company boards, including startups. Dubai-based payment app *Zywa* was co-founded by Nuha Hashem and is the first neo-bank designed for teenagers in the region. The platform allows teenagers to spend, receive and manage money without the need for cash and has raised \$3 million to expand across the Middle East. In the cryptocurrency space, women entrepreneur Dina Saman is driving a fast-growing crypto assets firm Coin MENA. Affective, a start-up co-founded by Egypt-born Rana El Kaliouby, has developed advanced AI technology that enables computers to recognise human emotions through physiological responses and facial cues. Meanwhile, Verity – a family banking and financial literacy app co-founded by Dina Shoman – has raised more than \$1 million to provide financial education for children and their parents.

An increasing number of women entrepreneurs are also entering the emerging fintech space. A significant number of women entrepreneurs have joined the Central Bank of Bahrain's regulatory sandbox, which serves as the launching pad for fintech companies providing value-added services to the financial sector. The high rate of female participation in STEM Education where female students outperform male students in education attainment indicators, the female workforce in technology-driven sectors as well as Women start-up founders are growing rapidly in the MENA region.

### **I. Diversity of the MENA region**

While acknowledging the remarkable growth in women entrepreneurs in the MENA region, we must be conscious of the diversity within the MENA region. Often, the academic world try to package MENA countries within a single bucket based on regional proximity and religious-cultural similarity. Sure, MENA countries are united by social religious and historical ties but cultural aspects alone cannot capture the multidimensional nature of gender inequality- the economic, political and social context matters too, contributing to diverse outcomes for women.

Defining the region is often confusing and different interpretations exist. The widely accepted definition of World Bank includes 21 countries, including six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates [UAE]), and 15 other countries or territories: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Yemen, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, and West Bank and Gaza.

MENA countries have significant economic diversity. The countries can be classified into different groups - First, there are resource-rich, labour-abundant countries that are producers and exporters of oil and gas and have large native populations (Algeria, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen). Then there are resource-rich, labour-importing countries that are oil exporters and have large shares of foreign or expatriate residents, constituting even the majority in some cases. This group of countries comprises the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

members (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) and Libya. Third, there are poor countries and importers of oil and gas. These countries include Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and the Palestinian Authority. An additional dimension of diversity stems from country risk as some of the countries are torn by war and conflicts for years which significantly affect opportunities for women in education, workforce and entrepreneurship (Yemen, Syria, Iraq).

As a result of the socio-economic and political diversity across MENA, a basic indicator of economic progress, the per capita income shows a lot of diversity – with the average Yemeni earning an equivalent of USD 1500 per annum while citizens of oil producing Gulf economies earn an average annual income of forty to fifty thousand dollars.

Table 1 Annual Per Capital Income (in USD) - 2019

Bahrain	42522	Algeria	11174
Kuwait	58,895	Lebanon	14655
Saudi Arabia	47495	Iran	12477
Qatar	92418	Iraq	10801
UAE	67,462	Syria	3673
Oman	25944	Yemen	1594
India	6681		
World	16734		

Source: International Monetary Fund

## **II. Human Development Indicators in the Mena region**

As a consequence of socioeconomic diversity across the MENA, the Human Development Index (HD) of the United Nations, an index that takes into account income, education and health attainments of a population, also shows remarkable variability.

On the relative scale, out of 189 countries, the MENA region’s HDI Rank is diverse. In 2020 the countries in the highest HDI bracket included - Israel 19<sup>th</sup>, UAE 31<sup>st</sup>, Saudi Arabia 40<sup>th</sup>, Bahrain 42<sup>nd</sup>, Qatar 45<sup>th</sup>. Those in the middle of

the global ranking were Oman 60<sup>th</sup>, Kuwait 64<sup>th</sup>, Iran 70<sup>th</sup>, Algeria 90<sup>th</sup>, Lebanon 91. At the lower end of the Scale were - Egypt 116, Morocco 121, Iraq 123, Syria 151, Djibouti 166 and Yemen 179.

The demographic Component of HDI, life expectancy, is generally within 66-78 years, with the global average being 72 years. Other than war-ravaged Yemen and Iraq, the life expectancy in other countries in the MENA region is above the global average. The mean years of Schooling of the population varies. The GCC countries exceed the global average of 8 years with a range of 9.5 to 12 years, Iran 12.3 years and other countries in the range of 3-8 years, Yemen is the most backward in terms of this educational attainment indicator.

**III. Women’s empowerment in the MENA region**

Let us look at the comparative picture of the Gender Development Index. GDI measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: health, measured by female and male life expectancy at birth; education, measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children and female and male mean years of schooling for adults ages 25 years and older; and command over economic resources, measured by female and male estimated earned income. The GDI is the ratio of the female HDI to the male HDI. Values below 1 indicate higher human development for men than women, while values above 1 indicate the opposite. Values closer to 1 therefore indicate higher gender equality. The GDI in Non-GCC countries are all below the global average (0.94), and Saudi Arabia is below the global average at 0.89. Barring Iraq and Yemen, most of the countries have better GDI than India (0.82).

Table 2: Gender Development Index (GDI) in MENA Countries

	GDI		
	1 is full equality		
Bahrain	0.922	Algeria	0.858
Kuwait	0.983	Lebanon	0.892
Saudi Arabia	0.896	Iran	0.866

Qatar	1.03	Iraq	0.774
UAE	0.931	Syria	0.829
Oman	0.936	Yemen	0.488
Comparison:			
India	0.82		
World	0.943		

Source: United Nations Development Programme Database.

### Labour force participation rate

Significant gender disparities exist across the Mena Region. Women's participation in the labour market is very low in the majority of Mena Countries. This has been reported in various studies by the United Nations, ILO and various research institutes. While the education for women is steadily increasing in the region, labour force participation remains much lower than the global average. This is often termed as the “MENA Paradox” where women’s education does not translate into greater labour force participation. Women tend to drop out at a rapid rate in various stages of education and career – at a rate much higher than the global rate. Part of the explanation is the social pressure that defines women’s role in family and society. With greater emphasis on women’s domestic responsibilities, women tend to prioritize family responsibilities over work. Some countries have tried to counter this with favourable labour laws – with adequate maternity leave and other measures that allow her to ensure a work-life balance.

Table 3: Female Labour Force Participation in the MENA Region

	Labour Participation ( % in 15-60 age group)				
	Female	Male		Female	Male
Bahrain	45	87	Algeria	14	67
Kuwait	49	87	Lebanon	22	71
Saudi Arabia	22	78	Iran	18	72
Qatar	56	94	Iraq	12	74
UAE	52	93	Syria	14	74
Oman	31	89	Yemen	5.8	70

India	20	76			
World	47	74			

Source: ILO

Some other indicators such as women bank account holders (i.e. percent of adult women with bank accounts) show very high percentages in Iran (92%), Bahrain (75%) and UAE (76%). As compared to the world average of 64% and India 76%.

The share of female students in STEM Courses is high in Algeria and Iran at about 30%, but low in GCC countries (between 10-20%), although the share is increasing rapidly in the region.

Political participation of women in the MENA region

MENA countries have representation of women in Parliament continues to be lower than global average, as shown below:

	Share of seat in Parliament		
Bahrain	18.9	Algeria	21.5
Kuwait	4.6	Lebanon	4.7
Saudi Arabia	19.9	Iran	5.9
Qatar	9.8	Iraq	25.2
UAE	50	Syria	13
Oman	9.9	Yemen	1
India	13.5		
World	24.6		

Source: Government statistics. Various reports

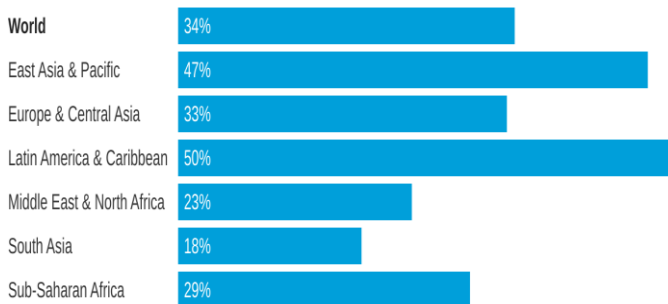
### **Women's entrepreneurship in MENA region: enablers and barriers**

Available data on Women's Entrepreneurship shows that in the United States, 12.3 million businesses in the United States are owned by women as compared

to 400000 in 1970s. Women entrepreneurs make up 43% of total business owners globally in 2021 (Halim, 2020). In the context of MENA region, a recent report observes that while 34 per cent of small and medium businesses are woman-owned, the comparable figure for the MENA region is 23 per cent. Within MENA, 49 per cent of businesses in Tunisia and 7 per cent in Yemen (Wilson Centre 2023). The World Bank Gender Data Portal shows the following global comparison of women's entrepreneurial activities across the world.

### Globally, only 1 in 3 businesses are owned by women

Share of small, medium, and large firms with a woman among the principal owners (%)



Source: Enterprise Surveys. Retrieved from The World Bank Gender Data Portal. • Embed this chart

### Enablers of Entrepreneurship

In view of the considerable diversity of resources and women's attainments in the MENA region, it is difficult to generalize on women's empowerment in general and entrepreneurship in particular.

The main elements that accelerate women's entrepreneurship include education, legal rights, access to finance and property and asset ownership. Countries tend to make progress on fundamental enablers before considering opportunity and inclusion or equality and security. Given that the three elements are interconnected, a change in one will affect the others.

A key enabler to women's entrepreneurship is undoubtedly educational attainment – both in terms of enrolment of students and outcome. In education,

significant progress has been made in terms of women's literacy, women's higher and secondary education and women's entry into STEM subjects. Governmental efforts in various countries to reform education has significantly increased the number of educated women, although the quality of education appears to be still lacking and does not promote workforce and business readiness (Wilson Centre, 2023). This also explains the observation that the closure of the gender gap in education has not yet been reflected in women's entry into the workforce as well as women's inability to crack the glass ceiling, rather succumbing to the sticky floor of the corporate world.

Apart from the skillset required to succeed in business, women also lack access to finance. While the Governments have created special financing options for women, women get constrained while accessing formal finance networks due to unequal inheritance where less than 5 per cent of the land ownership belongs to women.

The legal environment in MENA has undergone a significant transformation (Sinha, 2020). Many countries in MENA have amended discriminatory laws. The Women, Business, and the Law (WBL 2022) report of the World Bank observes that the index of legal rights in MENA has progressed the most in recent years, though at 53 it is still significantly lower than the global index of 76.5. Significant improvements were noted in legislation endorsing global conventions, and laws related to equal pay, maternity leaves, pension and entrepreneurship opportunities. The recently published WBL report 2024 shows further improvements in terms of legal enablement, though the gaps with other parts of the world still persist.

While many positive reforms have given women the freedom to participate in the workforce and pursue entrepreneurship, the process is hindered by the uneven nature of reform across countries, poor implementation of law and subtle patriarchal biases that hinder female entrepreneurship. Despite the enabling legislation relating to labour laws and laws relating to women in the workplace, Middle Eastern women still face challenges that reinforce existing inequalities throughout their professional or business careers. In parts



of MENA, women are still prohibited from selected economic activities, restricting workforce participation. Moreover, participation in entrepreneurial activities still require family approval.

### **Barriers and challenges facing women entrepreneurs in the MENA region**

Existing literature in the MENA region, though limited, throws some light on the barriers that prevent women from entering into economic activities through entrepreneurship as well as participation in the workforce. For example, Al-Alawi's study of the Bahraini women's workforce concludes that a mix of cultural and organizational obstacles affect women's entrepreneurial abilities (Al-Alawi, 2016). Al-Alawi observes that women's participation in productive sectors of the economy faces significant barriers such as patriarchal bias in the market decision-making-demand for, a shortage of applicable regulations as well as monitoring mechanisms; limitations in male and female cooperation in the marketplace, social bias against women's mobility, flexibility to perform job-related functions; and a shortage in providing programme to improve women's leadership skills. Similar findings were reported by Sperling, Marcati, Rennie, & Ellis, 2014. Moreover, some studies highlight that personal, family, societal and political factors as well as factors that exist within the working environment prevent women from achieving full empowerment potential in the workforce as well as in entrepreneurial roles (Karolak, 2012).

Having benefitted from the significant opportunities for higher education provided by the government, Bahraini women are keen to utilise their knowledge to contribute to society. However, formal employment in the public and private sectors often significantly constrains women by relegating them to lower positions without significant avenues to contribute to institutional advancement. Seikaly (1994) found that women strongly held the view that the general employment policy of the government sector in the region blocks the promotion of women, even when they are better qualified, more thoroughly trained and have more experience than men. Wilkinson's (1996, p. 109) study of women in top management positions in the Persian Gulf region found that the challenges faced by women in the workspace included overt and subtle

discrimination at work, cultural taboos, negative attitudes towards working women and a lack of confidence and trust in women managers.

Moreover, women entrepreneurs are sometimes perceived to be less credible and capable than men. The existence of stereotypes and preconceptions about the roles and capabilities of women have kept them from risk-taking behaviour of starting and growing businesses. The perception that doing business with women is riskier often dissuades investors and customers. The risk perception also places a barrier in access to formal financing opportunities such as commercial loans. While the gender gap in bank accounts, and credit card access is diminishing, the skewed availability of finance constrains women's entrepreneurial prospects. Another cultural factor is the duty of household and nurturing children that society bestows on women. While progressive labour legislation attempts to ease work-related constraints, this does not take away a woman's primary role in bringing up children. Societal expectations lead women to opt out of the progression in their role as workers or drop out of the formal employment sector to focus on domestic responsibilities.

From a policy perspective, the alleviation of institutional constraints thus does not remove the cultural barriers to women's participation in work. This has been the pattern across the globe but is extremely pertinent in Arab societies where society revolves around the family and the concept of family honour (Sharaf) is of paramount importance. Protection of women has traditionally been synonymous with the preservation of family honour and women have been under the monitoring of male guardians. The protection of unmarried women by their fathers and the guardianship of married women by their husbands are societal norms that modern legal structures have not been able to dismantle.

### **Emerging opportunities and strategic choices**

Despite the above constraints, women entrepreneurs have made remarkable progress in recent years. In the context of Bahrain, in 2001, Mona Al-Moayed was the first woman elected to the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI). By 2003, the number of women members had reached 1,785,

representing 15 per cent of the BCCI's membership. Women have done remarkably well in many businesses, and their success stories give credence to the belief that they can contribute effectively to public and private sector companies (Sadi & Al-Ghazali 2012, p. 101). Empirical evidence on Bahrain and Oman reported by Dechant and Al-Lamky (2005) found that pull factors, such as opportunity, the need for achievement, self-fulfilment and the desire to help others, motivated women to become entrepreneurs in most cases. A list of successful women entrepreneurs in Bahrain can be found in the following link: <https://bentrepreneur.biz/most-inspiring-women-entrepreneurs-in-bahrain/>.

In this context, enhancing a gender-inclusive policy and regulatory frameworks and strategies to enable the creation and growth of women-led enterprises a set of actionable ideas for policymakers in the region include:

- Policy interventions that improve fiscal measures (gender budgeting) and promote financial inclusion,
- reforms to discriminatory laws
- greater investment in women's skills and networks
- Reduce gender digital gaps to prepare women entrepreneurs for future marketplace
- Gender sensitization in society to address deep-rooted patriarchal biases.

At the policy level, sustainable development of MENA women in the productive sectors of the economy (both as part of the workforce and entrepreneurs) requires multi-pronged strategies for women's empowerment. These must include policies to guide industry to promote greater female participation and diversity in senior positions and human resource management initiatives to engage the female workforce in positions of responsibility. Regulations towards gender budgeting and gender-sensitive data collection processes should be included in organisations.

At the organizational level, the principle of equal opportunities should be included in structural policies and regulations. Educational and skill

development initiatives that focus on developing a balance between women's academic understanding, work ethics and motivation to grow in the workplace. Clear and vigorous career development opportunities plan with an apparent path for development should be conducted. Committees should be established within organisations to monitor as well as prevent discriminatory practices in career progression. Organizational support should be provided for women to help them achieve a balance between family responsibilities and job commitments. Importantly, gender sensitization of the workforce particularly at the senior management and the board level should be an important initiative to develop an understanding of the hindrances faced by women as well as to counter the perception bias against women. Since most successful women entrepreneurs hone their skills in various organizations before launching businesses, gender equality in the workplace positively contributes to women's entrepreneurship.

To maximize women entrepreneurs' opportunities and abilities to access finance, it is imperative to incentivize and support financial institutions to develop adequate financial products and services – including digital financial services – addressing the specific needs of women entrepreneurs.

These efforts should be coupled with increased investments and targeted interventions to enhance women entrepreneurs' digital capabilities, including by leveraging technology and other effective inclusion strategies. Sustaining and accelerating women entrepreneurs' participation in the digital economy will require additional efforts and enhanced public-private collaboration to strengthen women's digital inclusion. The private sector plays a vital role in increasing the affordability and access to the internet, devices, and digital upskilling opportunities for women entrepreneurs, and supporting the digital transformation of their businesses.

While the GCC countries have progressed a lot in this aspect, the other parts of the MENA region need public sector and private sector co-ordination to reduce digital gaps across gender. This requires mainstreaming gender perspectives in digital policies and strategies to increase women entrepreneurs' access to and

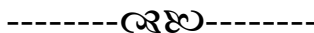
use of digital technologies. Ensuring universal connectivity, accessibility and affordability of the Internet are prerequisites to achieving digital and financial inclusion. This was the focus of the UN Secretary-General's report on the priority theme for the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women: "Innovation and Technological Change, and Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls", October 2022. (Link: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/202212/Final%20CSW67%20EGM%20Report%2013%20DEC.pdf>)

The critical component of reducing perception bias in society cannot be attained through legislative initiatives. This change comes over a long period of time through the slow evolution of social perception. The region is already demonstrating signs of such change in social consciousness as more and more families support education and accept the workforce participation of female members. Greater sensitization of women's constraints in society through workshops, media campaigns and gender-sensitive curricula can contribute to a more conducive atmosphere where women can contribute their full potential towards nation-building and economic progress. The evolution of social consciousness thus should form a core element of a strategy for women's empowerment and the success of women entrepreneurs.

## References

- Al-Alawi, A. I. I (2016, July). Status of Bahraini women in the banking and financial sector: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 17(4), 210–228.
- Central Bank of Bahrain. (2015, April 29). CBB and SCW meet industry leaders to promote year-long campaign promoting successor women in the financial and banking sector.
- Dechant, K., & Al-Lamky, A. (2005). Towards an understanding of Arab women entrepreneurs in Bahrain and Oman. *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, 10(2), 123–40.
- Dines, E. (1993). *Overview in women in higher education management*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat; Paris: UNESCO.
- Halim, D. "Women Entrepreneurs Needed—Stat!" World Bank, 2020. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/women-entrepreneurs-needed-stat>.

- Kharabsheh, R., and L. Alexandre. “The Evolution of Female Entrepreneurship in the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Case of Bahrain.” *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* 11, no. 4 (2019): 390–407.
- Karolak, M. (2012, October). Bahraini women in the 21st century: Disputed Legacy of the unfinished revolution. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 13(5), 5–16.
- Sadi, M. A., & Basheer M. Al-Ghazali. (2012). The dynamics of entrepreneurial motivation among women: A comparative study of businesswomen in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. *Asian Academy of Management Journal*, 17(1), 97–113.
- Seikaly, M. (1994). Women and social change in Bahrain. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 26, 415–426.
- Sinha, C. “Women in the Bahrain Financial Sector: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategic Choices.” *Social Change* 50, no. 1 (2020): 44–60.
- Sperling, J., Marcati, C., Rennie, M., & Ellis, T. (2014). GCC women in leadership: From the first to the norm unlocking women’s potential to enhance organizational effectiveness in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Retrieved from: [http://www.mckinsey.com/global\\_locations/europe\\_and\\_middleeast/middle\\_east/en/gc\\_c\\_women\\_in\\_leadership](http://www.mckinsey.com/global_locations/europe_and_middleeast/middle_east/en/gc_c_women_in_leadership)
- Supreme Council for Women (SCW). (2015). Bahraini women in the financial sector.
- ———. (2016). Bahraini women in numbers.
- ———. (2017). Initiatives of the financial and banking sector in support of Bahraini women.
- Techreport.2023. Women Entrepreneurs Statistics 2023: The Rise of Sheconomy. [Link](#)
- Wilkinson, G. (1996). *Women in business*. Dubai: Gulf Business.
- Wilson Centre. 2023. *Women Entrepreneurship in MENA: The Cases of Bahrain, Lebanon, and Tunisia*. Middle East Women’s Initiative (MEWI)
- World Economic Forum. (2015). *The Global Gender Gap Report*. Geneva.
- ——— (2023). Empowering female entrepreneurs in the Middle East, Jun 27, 2023. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/06/middle-east-empowering-female-entrepreneurs/>.



## **Gender, Internal Migration in the Cities and Urbanisation in India: Learnings of the Pandemic Triggered Lockdown**

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

### **Introduction**

The migrant crisis triggered by Covid-19 pandemic was even more acute for women and gender minorities who faced innumerable intersectional vulnerabilities of gender, region, class, caste, religion, ethnicity, age, language and disability. Both men and women migrant workers living in rented rooms and who were making valuable contribution to the Indian economy through their labour largely in the informal sector as daily wage workers in the manufacturing sector and construction industry, as home-based workers for the small-scale garment and electronic industries, as street vendors, as domestic workers in the gated middle and upper-class housing societies, platform-based service providers such as elderly and child care workers, beauticians domestic help (Alfers, 2020) and in the mobility sector of the gig economy in the urban and peri-urban areas faced near homelessness and starvation conditions (Tondon and Rathi, 2022). The majority of these migrant workers had hardly any support system in the neo-liberal cities of the gated communities and exploitative employers; and were governed by the decision-makers in the urban governance structures and systems. The haunting scenario in the live videos and heart-wrenching photographs of ‘reverse migration’ during May 2020, shared by the citizens captured the plight of the poor migrant men, women, children, transgender persons, elderly individuals, persons with disabilities walking and cycling for days together to cover distance of hundreds of kilometres to reach their homes; taking their bare essentials on their back and parents carrying their children on their shoulders, adolescent girls and boys carrying heavy belongings, braving scorching heat of the Indian summer and facing acute hunger during hundreds of miles of walking back to their native places; will prick conscience of sensitive people for generations to come (Patel, 2022).

Despair and unimaginable human miseries faced by tens of thousands of poor women leaving the urban centres that included pregnant women; pregnant

women in acute labour pain and delivering babies on highways; mothers with infants in tow, lone elderly women walking without foot-wear, blood oozing from bristles on their feet forced the state and non-state actors to deliberate on gender implications of rural-urban and urban-urban migration (PUCL, 2020). In labour studies and urban studies, hitherto invisibilised, unnoticed, unidentified, unreported, under-reported and unrecognised women migrant workers became the subject matter of serious research. During 2020-2021, throughout the total and partial lockdown periods, not a single day passed by, without horror stories and pictures of the reverse migration by migrant women crying for help, delivering babies on the road and at the hospital gates as they were denied entry in the government hospitals without ‘proper documents’ (Jenna et al, 2022). They were famished and bleeding, dying due to dehydration and hunger, sexually violated and kidnapped, ill-treated in the containment zones by the ‘locals’ and at the jumbo COVID-centres; and those who tried to leave the cities were brutalised by the police, reported missing on the way, robbed and trafficked (SWANa, 2020). They suffered enormous and long-lasting mental and emotional stress (Afridi et al, 2021; Ghosh 2020).

### **Migrant Workers in the Unorganised Sector of Urban India in the Pre-Pandemic Period**

As per the 2011 Census, 45.36 crore Indians (37 per cent) were migrants, and around 21.7 crore were girls/ women who were found settled in a place different from their previous residence and were classified as migrants. The latest estimates of the total internal migrant population in India were 139 million (i.e. 13 crore and 90 lakhs) as per 2011 census.<sup>1</sup> Around 33% of all migrant persons are inter-state or inter-district migrants. Thus, the current strength of total inter-state and inter-district migrant workers is 14 crores, out of which the girls/women migrant workers are over 3 crores. While Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and Bihar the major source states; next come Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal; the major destination states

---

<sup>1</sup> Census, 2011, Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs. <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/population-finder>.

Accessed on 6-4-2024



are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The Migrant workers employed as daily wage earners both men and women suffered the most during the lockdown due to loss of earnings, inability to pay rent for their dwelling place, and lack of purchasing power to buy ration and vegetables leading to hunger, morbidity and recurring illnesses. On top of this, due to unsettled existential reality, they also faced extreme cruelty from law enforcement personnel (SWAN 2020a). Homeless migrant workers walking long distances on the roads of national and state highways and railway tracks were brutalised by the local police and border security forces. Migrant workers on the move using forest routes had to face the brutality of the forest officials for ‘trespassing’. The middle-class and upper-class biases of the neoliberal government officials in the municipal corporations/councils in the urban and peri-urban cities were most pronounced as most of the advisories and notices tried to protect the welfare of the residents of the gated housing societies. A large majority of migrant women working in urban homes as domestic workers who were victims of pre-existing socio-economic inequalities were left in the lurch (ILO, 2020). Their human miseries compounded as even in the pre-pandemic era, they were at a disadvantageous position due to the absence of the state-supported protective legislation, social security and social protection (Aajivika Bureau, 2020). Their positioning at the bottom of the Indian economy, coupled with caste/religion-based patriarchal culture and tradition influencing the gender stereotypes accentuated their intersectional vulnerabilities (Kumar and Baliyan, 2023).

### **Political Economy of Gendered Migration**

The downward spiral of economic activities during the period of ‘reverse migration’ of the pandemic, made the employers and the state, for the first time, publicly acknowledge the crucial contribution of migrant workers and migrant employees for the nation’s economic growth. A macro study of major sectors that employed migrant workers in India revealed that the economic contribution of circular migrants amounts to 10 per cent to the national GDP (Deshingkar and Akter, 2015). The painful experiences during the pandemic triggered lockdown revealed that the working-class migrant population remains in economically precarious conditions marked by existential crisis of overcrowded homes, poor

sanitation and hazardous living conditions. They had to survive with bare subsistence wages from insecure employment largely in the informal sector marked by ‘the law of jungle’, mostly with a total absence of social security, social protection and labour standards (ILO, 2020). The migrant workers are deprived of citizenship rights and hence have to face harsh urban reality without entitlements, representation, political constituency (Aajivika Bureau, 2020). This stark reality has been succinctly documented by several rapid assessment studies and grounded research during and after the pandemic that profiled vividly multifaceted vulnerabilities to discrimination, exploitation and violence by state and non-state actors (Working People’s Coalition, 2021; Xavier, 2021; Guha, Neti, and Lobo ,2023; Kumar and Baliyan 2023; Mazumdar & Neetha, 2020, Patel, 2022).

### **Rural Realities**

Defeminisation of agriculture has resulted in an increasing number of young women migrating from their rural native place to the metropolis as well as the tier two and the tier 3 cities for employment in manufacturing, construction or service/care sectors of the urban economy. Within rural areas also, women employed in infrastructural projects are in the category of ‘unskilled’ workers. The predicament of migrant women from rural origin to the urban destination are determined by marriage, family reunion, coerced labour, search for urban employment and trafficking for slave labour, forced marriage or sex trade (Beth, Frederickson and Sanmiguel-Valderrama, 2018). The precarity of Women’s migration is enhanced in the segmented labour market due to gender stereotypes perpetuated by socio-cultural and policy-level hurdles that hamper women’s mobility choices (Chakraborty, 2022).

### **Reverse Migration to the Native Place due to PANDEMIC Triggered Lockdown:**

As per the Ministry of Labour, 45 crore workers are in the informal sector that constitute 92 % of the workforce in the Indian economy and one-fourth of the total migrant population in India is composed of women and girls (Seth, 2020). During the pandemic, they faced four pronged hardships due to loss of wages

and livelihoods, exposure to coronavirus infection, brutal dislocation causing anxiety about children's future and insecurity about relocation and to top it all unprecedented intensity of gender-based violence (Patel and Goelnitz, 2020). Migrant women faced multifaceted crises in their survival struggles due to serious challenges posed by the disruption of the supply chain of essential goods and services, no access to sanitary requirements to maintain menstrual hygiene and reproductive health needs, erosion of past savings due to the lockdown and more pronounced and persistent unemployment (as compared to their male counterparts) even after the lifting of the lockdown due to recession. This harsh reality also strengthened gender stereotypes such as '*Men are bread earners and women are home makers*', '*When so many men are queuing up for work, why should women compete with them*', '*Women's first duty is to nurse their children, elderly, sick family members*' (Conley, 2020; Christou & Kofman, 2022). On their way back, at some places they were offered food, water, foot-ware by the non-government organisations. Their roller coaster ride of travelling back did not have a happy ending. Back home they found their relatives in the rural areas were facing deprivation, and hunger and were unwelcome due to the stigma of the 'spreading coronavirus' (SWAN, 2021 b & Xavier, 2021).

### **Gender Differential Treatment by the State Agencies**

After the total lock down was lifted, in the massive employment generation programmes under *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme* as well as *Garib Kalyan Yojana* were initiated by the state. Here, even the government officers were promoting men's entitlement to employment. Thus, the logic of capitalist patriarchy that '*women to be fired first at the time of economic downturn and hired last when economy has an upward spiral*' became operational. Even the state agencies promoting employment generation programmes under 125 schemes of *Garib Kalyan Yojana* would emphasise male entitlement for employment and discourage women to seek employment and order them to "*go home and look after their family members*". The state-sponsored 'targeted and not universalised' schemes of *Garib Kalyan Yojana* for support to the poor were insufficiently funded schemes and required

the submission of too many documents that the homeless migrant families and persons could not produce (Patel, 2022). Thus, women in the unorganised sector were and are economically hit harder by the sociocultural impact of coronavirus-triggered health emergency (Patel and Goelnitz, 2020).

### **Changing Perceptions on Migration**

It is noteworthy that various waves of the coronavirus pandemic during the tumultuous two years of 2020 to 2022 have changed the perspective on the conventional concept of factors influencing migration patterns. During the pandemic-induced lockdown, factors that pulled the rural folks to the urban centres for better prospects of livelihoods pushed them out due to unemployment, homelessness and hunger (Xavier, 2021). In the urban centres, the Infectious virus was overpowered by homelessness, starvation and hunger of migrant workforce rendered unemployed due to the nationwide lockdown. More than 2/3rd the migrant workforce in India was forced to return to their native places by every possible means available-trucks, containers, goods train, tempos braving nakabandi by police and putting up with merciless brutality from police, bullies, sexual predators even after paying commissions to the transporters (SWAN 2020 b & c; Jan Sahas, 2020). Young, middle aged and elderly women migrant workers who were penniless as their employers did not pay them wages, started their journey from their cities to their native places on foot, walking on roads and railway tracks, through forests and fields (Xavier, 2021).

### **Migrant Women's Predicament in the Post-Pandemic Era of Industry 4.0**

Most of the growth strategies recommended by mainstream economists to rebuild the broken economy during the pandemic are focussing on technology-driven Industry 4.0 marked by the introduction of digitalisation and Industry 5.0 which uses collaborative robots machine learning, blockchain technologies in the manufacturing sector and physical infrastructure to intensify the drive for SMART CITIES MISSION. Digitally unconnected women in the workforce are the major losers of the digital divide (Biswal and Rath 2022; Thampi, 2023; Bakhla, Chatterjee, Guthala 2020). In the post pandemic period, in the absence of required skill sets, women workers have no employment opportunities in Industry 5.0 production processes that apply robots and smart machines working

alongside people. In the SMART city discourses, there is no vision for gender inclusivity or a systematic plan for skill upgradations and digital connectivity for migrant women who have been rendered unemployed during the pandemic (Nikore & Ishita, 2021). Even the Skill India Mission, Stand-Up India Mission and Start-Up India Mission have hardly any concern for employment generation for the majority of migrant women who were working in the urban informal sector during the pre-pandemic period (Nayana, & Kumar, 2019).

### **Rural-rural Migration of Women**

Farmers agitation against the imposition of three statutes for farm sectors concerning agricultural product pricing, contract farming, and agricultural subsidies in the midst of the pandemic was supported wholeheartedly by a nationwide organisation Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch which highlighted that agrarian sector reforms guided by neo-liberal logic to promote corporatisation of Indian agriculture would cause a death blow to the rural poor women who were largely agricultural workers, marginal farmers and poor peasants in the subsistence production and tribal women dependent on forest produce. Even in the pre-pandemic period, the agrarian distress resulting in the determination of the farm sector was forcing rural women to migrate to the cities in search of wage-employment or petty trade in the urban centres and also emigrate outside India as revealed in innumerable studies (Narain and Bhattacharya, 2013; Pattadath 2020; Nair, 2020). During the pandemic, women agricultural workers travelling in the harvest time from their native place to the destination place as seasonal workers suffered immeasurable hardships. (Kaur, Ramchandran and Nanda, 2020; Guha and Lobo, 2023). Tribal communities across the country travelling from their hamlets to the forest areas for collection of forest produce were mercilessly beaten up by the police and forest officials (Shylendra, 2023).

### **Draconian Labour Codes**

During the pandemic, the state also tried to impose four new labour codes regarding wages, industrial relations, social security occupational safety, health and working conditions, and the freezing of 29 central and 200 state specific labour laws have been vehemently opposed by the trade union movements. These hastily passed, crudely-drafted and gender-blind farm laws and labour

codes violated the ILO Covenant, C190 - *Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019*, to which India is a signatory. This was responded by massive opposition by the trade unions and women's organisations. At a shop floor levels, in Bangalore, and Ahmedabad, young women migrant workers from rural areas who were inducted as casual workers in the manufacturing units and made to work for 12-16 hours during the pandemic rebelled against inhuman work conditions, non-payment of wages and sexual harassment at workplace (Thomas and Jayram, 2020). Anganwadi and ASHA workers, nurses also struggled against deplorable work conditions, insensitivity of the regime towards health hazards faced by them and non-payment of even state-stipulated minimum wages who demanded that they be treated as workers eligible for payment of wages, not volunteers eligible for paltry honorarium (Dasgupta and Mitra, 2020). Women who left the cities did not die on the way and after umpteen hardships managed to reach their native places in the rural areas were also rendered helpless as work under MG NREGA was diverted to men alone. Reintegrating women migrant workers in the manufacturing of garments, electronics and food processing and establishing labour standards guided by ILO's 'decent work' code becomes a need of an hour (Mitra and Sinha, 2021).

Dr. Indu Prakash Singh (2020), in his grounded research reported multifaceted hardships encountered by rickshaw pullers in Delhi. The researchers also documented deprivation and mesmerisation faced by sex workers in the Indian urban centres and agricultural labourers in rural areas during the pandemic<sup>1</sup> and also highlighted the learning crisis leading to a generational catastrophe amid the COVID-19 pandemic due to loss of girl-children's education.<sup>2</sup> They documented the deplorable predicaments of the homeless

---

<sup>1</sup> Mehta, S. and Kumar, A. (2020) Relief and Livelihood with Dignity for Delhi's City Makers: Panel Discussion, <https://www.impriindia.com/event-report/citymakers-delhi-on-life-in-the-era-of-covid-19/>. Accessed on 22-6-2023

<sup>2</sup> Paik, S. (2020) Learning Crisis leading to a Generational Catastrophe amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact on Children's Education and Gender Equality,

migrant families and individuals, both men and women, in urban India, mainly migrants from the rural hinterlands of different states and union territories of India who were brutalised by the loan sharks, destitution, caste atrocities, communal tensions and extreme weather. His participatory action research of the last two decades shows that the contribution of these migrant men and women is central to urban economic growth. He calls them ‘City Makers’, working-class men and women who are construction workers, casual labour in the small and medium scale units, tailors, rickshaw pullers, waster recyclers, domestic workers, food servers (Ghosh and Kaur, 2020), vegetable, fruit and street vendors (SEWA, 2020), hawkers selling manufactured goods, workers in the petty stalls selling food, snacks and tea – who are at the poorest of the poor in the urban economy and mostly belong to the scheduled caste, Other Backward Classes and Muslims (Singh, 2016). Poor Muslim migrant workers also happen to be *Pasmanda* (*Arzals* i.e. Dalit and *Ajlafs* i.e. backward-caste) Muslims (Songara, 2022).

### **Double Burden of paid and Unpaid Work**

Women shouldered the major load of free care work such as cooking, cleaning, home-schooling of children and enhanced care responsibilities of sick members of the family, children and the elderly (Conley, 2020). The lockdown also imposed hunger and deprivation among the marginalised homeless poor who did not have either bank account or Adhar card to access state supported relief measures. They were totally dependent for their shelter, daily essentials, masks and medicines on local initiatives of distribution of food packets, running of shelter camps with community kitchens.

Total lockdown to control the spread of the coronavirus infection had created a situation of starvation in poor communities, who had lost their daily income and source of livelihood. In addition to this, basic amenities like water, electricity, housing, sanitation, healthcare etc. which are constitutional guarantees were not

---

<https://www.impriindia.com/event/learning-crisis-leading-to-a-generational-catastrophe-amid-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>. Accessed on 23-6-2023

accessible to the poor communities in the situation of lockdown, either due to unaffordability or unavailability, exposing them further to the disease. Further, protective gear like PPE suits, N95 masks, gloves and medical equipment like ventilators were not available in adequate quantities, adding stress to the already stretched out public healthcare system and exposing the medical professionals and staff to great risk and hardship operating in the working-class areas, camps for the homeless migrant men, women, children and the COVID centres. Intersectional vulnerabilities of migrant women compounded during the pandemic due to the enhanced burden of unpaid care work and the escalation of domestic violence. Under the cloak of lockdown, rampant violence in the streets and public places remained unattended by the justice system. Economic distress among the migrant workers resulted in girls being forced out of education, increased child marriages, forced marriages and trafficking of girls and women. However, this situation could have been avoided with proper coordination and outreach, such that no person in the city is made to suffer. There were regional variation in response to COVID-19. Kerala was found to be the best and most responsive to the needs of the migrant workforce in general and migrant women in particular with its robust economic support in terms of cash and free food provision, employment, free accommodations to migrant workers/families and zero-interest loans to women. (Ramakumar and Eapen, 2021).

In the midst of this hopeless situation, the non-government organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), self-help groups (SHGs) and trade unions (TUs), with their exemplary relief work and social solidarity efforts served as ‘conscience keepers for the humanity’ (Mishra and Rath, 2020).

### **Heroic Contributions of NGOs, CSOs, CBOs, SHGs and Trade Unions**

Several big and small organisations throughout the country including SEVA Bharat (India), JAGORI (Delhi and Himachal Pradesh), *Ghar Bachao Ghar Banao Andolan* (Mumbai), SAKTI (Bangalore), Annapurna (Pune), federations of SHGs, Central trade Unions, Farmers’ Cooperatives, youth and students’ organisations across the country were doing relief work among the migrant communities during the total as well as partial lockdown. However, these efforts



by the non-state actors could not match the needs of millions of migrant people on the move. Many members of these organisations also walked with the migrant families documented their woes and prepared reports for pressuring the government to be accountable and meet the urgent needs of the migrant workforce. As a result, state supported community kitchens, shelters, free detection centres and information desks, helplines were instituted in the later part of the pandemic period.

Here are some issues that were documented as they were faced by poor migrant persons living in the urban slums due to the lockdown to contain COVID-19.

### **Practical Gender Needs**

There were a large number of people living in slums who did not possess ration card of any kind in urban India. They were migrant workers either living with their families or in a large group in exceedingly small shacks or rooms. Many state governments had agreed to provide food rations to these groups of people without ration cards. For millions of informal sector employees who could not pay rent as they had neither received their salaries/wages nor did they have savings, had to vacate their rented dwelling places. The relief camps had been started and community kitchens were supported by municipal corporations and councils in urban locations, voluntary groups and philanthropic bodies. Fresh, edible, healthy and nutritious cooked food and its supplies needed to be expanded to cover all the poor and needy populations. Hence, both in the rural as well as the urban areas, the government had to step in and upscale the cooked food supplies to the communities that need it. The citizens' associations had only one source of communication with the authorities and other service providers as well as dissemination of public messages sent by the police and local-state-unions governments on a daily basis. They also shared videos and pictures capturing violence and ill-treatment of migrant people by the employers, police, private transport owners and government administration (SEWA, 2020; Aajivika Bureau, 2020; SWAN a,b,c, 2020; Jansaahas, 2020; MAKAAM, 2021).

The women's rights organisations along with human rights organisations, issued statement (2020) and mobilised public opinion on 10 crucial concerns that demanded urgent action:

1. Food security either in terms of grocery or ready to eat food for the poor in socio-economic distress. Central Government had announced that cooking gas is to be provided free of cost to 83 million women registered under Ujjwala scheme. NGOs and CSOs had also demanded that gas cylinders and cooking fuel must be given free of cost, irrespective of registration in the Ujwala schemes and must also be reached to those eligible under the Ujwala scheme.
2. Health Care for women to address reproductive health needs of pregnant and lactating mothers, women in labour, women demanding medical termination of pregnancy due to unwanted pregnancy as contraceptive were not available during the lockdown.
3. Educational needs of school and college students who were victims of the digital divide. Concerted efforts to bring back these segments of students who were forced out of educational institutions due to their dire economic circumstances.
4. Reduction of social inequality by addressing the gender norms that assign housework to only and exclusively to women and girls. As against this, the approach of shared responsibility of all family members to be promoted. They also demanded national-level helplines in regional languages and standard operative procedures for state support for homeless people throughout the country and inter-state dialogues official bodies for smooth travel of the migrant persons who were on move.
5. Water and sanitation became the most important concern to contain ill-effects of coronavirus. Hence, the people's health movement demanded that under no circumstances the supply of clean water be disconnected for inability of poor people to pay the local taxes.
6. Reduction of economic inequality through the fiscal expansion for income support to the poor jobless people, increase in social sector budgeting and financial allocation with special focus to reduce gender gaps in education,

health, employment and support services to the survivors of gender-based violence.

7. Human rights-oriented protocols were demanded by democratic rights organisations and public interest litigations were filed in the Supreme Court of India to stop abuse of people in the shelter camps, isolation centres, mental asylums, detention centres and prisons that were overcrowded during the pandemic due to arbitrary arrests of the homeless people.
8. Witch-hunting: Women groups campaigned against targeting and stigmatising of particular religious minority during the pandemic and holding them responsible of worsening public health crisis.
9. Safeguards for Front Line Workers Women's groups demanded that Anganwadi workers and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and community-based volunteers who were risking their lives be given the topmost priority by the state in terms of personal protection equipment. Moreover, they be given a status of workers with state stipulated wages as against being labelled as 'volunteers' and paid a nominal honorarium.
10. Direct Cash Transfer (DCT) for impoverished workers: There was an urgent need for direct cash transfers to poor women who had lost their livelihood. Women's groups demanded that women hawkers should be given preference to be essential suppliers of vegetable, fish. The trade union movement had demanded strict action against wage theft by the employers and payment of back wages to the unorganised sector migrant workers.

Most of these concerns are relevant even now. After the total and partial lockdown period got over, the government efforts were expected to be geared to recognise the problem of very low work participation of women and provide necessary relief to the migrant women from poverty groups in the informal sector, improve the quality of job opportunities for all women; support self-employment of women vendors and entrepreneurs in the urban centres; create separate funds for regenerating women's businesses in both own account enterprises as well as within cooperatives and SHGs with recognition of losses incurred by them due to the supply chain disruptions in women's businesses caused due to the pandemic triggered lockdown. Relief measures in the post-

COVID scenario needed to pay attention to facilitate their economic stability into these sectors, with proper remunerations and social security coverage. Aadhar-linked wages for Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Scheme and other anti-poverty programmes covered under Garib Kalyan Yojana demand rethinking as they deny poor women without Aadhar Card access to the state-supported services for food security, health services, seed money for starting micro-enterprise and employment in the urban areas. The government should use learnings of the pandemic as an opportunity to revisit the strategies of employment generation to include women as a central actor and focus on increasing/strengthening both wage and self-employment opportunities among the poverty groups of all gender spectrums in the urban areas.

### **Strategic Gender Needs and Macro-Economic Measures**

Transformative financing and gender-responsive budgeting, hostels for migrant workers in general and women migrant workers in particular, judicious implementation of protective labour laws and making ‘smart cities’ migrant and gender-friendly cities are the top most strategic gender needs in Urban India.

Women’s labour force participation has remained considerably low in comparison to that of men. Within a decade of 2005 to 2022, the number of working women in India dropped from 26.8 to 23.5% of the total working population<sup>1</sup>. Expanding gainful economics opportunities and implementing ILO’s labour standards of ‘Decent Work’<sup>2</sup> the most important strategic gender need for India.

In terms of macroeconomic measures, the role of Government becomes crucial for fiscal widening. The government bodies should work in tandem with civil

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=IN>. Accessed on 21-6-2023

<sup>2</sup>ILO (2021) ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Eighth edition Updated estimates and analysis. October. Geneva: International Labour Organisation, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_824092.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_824092.pdf). Accessed on 22-6-2023

society organisations, women's rights groups, queer groups and self-help organisations for gender inclusive implementation of PM Garib Kalyan Yojana / PM Kisan Yojana, Jan Dhan Yojana, Relief and Wages for Migrant Labour, PM Garib Kalyan Yojana (Pension), PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana, Nutritious food at the doorstep for beneficiaries under Anganwadi, Schemes Fisherfolks, Ujjwala free gas cylinder, MGNREGA, PDS, Mid-Day Meal, Ration for Non- Ration Card Holders, and availability of public health services (Tool Kit, 2020). Under MG NAREGA paid care work for maintenance and management of community kitchens, child care centres, elderly care centres, and one-stop crisis centres for the survivors of gender-based violence can be generated after completion of the short-term courses by the district authorities.

Universalisation of PDS is a need of an hour under these situations of scarcity of food, women within households tend to eat less. Universalisation of PDS beyond the next six months, with special attention to migrant worker households and expansion of the food basket would be extremely important to avoid longer-term nutritional and health hazards for women. This will be in addition to the cash transfers announced under the PM's GKY and in addition to the provision of rice and pulses through the PDS.

Employers organisations are talking vigorously about massive introduction of artificial intelligence, robotics, and automation in the economy. Hence, all existing missions for Skilling/ Upskilling/ reskilling courses available online must make concerned efforts for induction of girls, women, transgender persons so that in this era of the 'future of work' informed by Industry 4.0 and Industry 5.0, they are job-ready.

### **Conclusion**

The major learnings of reverse migration during the COVID-19 pandemic have, for the first time, brought 'invisible' migrants to the centre stage of policy concern around social policy to safeguard their dignity, safety and survival needs. In the wake of the COVID-19 triggered lockdown, the very factors that made them desirable as a workforce are turning against them

(Sengupta and Jha, 2020). In its policy brief, the United Nations (2020) had asked the nation states to be gender inclusive in the measures for economic recovery. Feminist Policy Collective (FPC, 2021), Civil liberties and democratic rights organisations have demanded public policies cognizant of socio-economic perspective of human rights that addresses rights to food and nutrition, education and skill, dignity of human person and violence free life (PUCL, 2020). As we do not have gender disaggregated data on varied nature of rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-urban, urban-rural and cross-country migration, there are hardly any policies regarding voluntary and forced migration of women and children (Mitra and Sinha, 2021). To avoid gender exclusion in labour market policies and the invisibilisation of migrant women, both, Ministry of Labour as well as Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation-MOSPI need to include age and gender disaggregated data on a priority basis (Sapra, 2020). With deteriorating economic conditions in the rural and tribal areas, the distress migration has escalated forcing women to migrate to the urban centres (Shylendra, 2023).

After the partition, for the first time, such a massive scale of exodus of people took place under tremendous human miseries. During nationwide lockdowns 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, 4.0; for the first time in the history of economic migration, millions of assetless poor-hungry-totally helpless migrant people had to go back to their native places empty-handed. During the pandemic, Migrant women faced multiple marginalities due to exacerbation of traditional gender roles and differential treatment of women and girls as compared to men and boys. In the safe city mission, the urban local self-government bodies in collaboration with NGOs, CBOs, CSOs and TUs, need to put in place structures and systems for migrant women in socio-economic distress by institutionalising Women's Resource Centres with 24x7 helplines, counselling facilities, skill development and prevention of gender-based violence. Last but not least, Fast-tracking registration of all migrant workers in general and women migrant workers to the Unorganized Workers Social Security Board as per Supreme Court notification issues in 2017, is a need of an hour.

## References

- Aajeevika Bureau (2020) Unlocking the Urban: Reimagining Migrant Lives in Cities Post-COVID 19. <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/unlocking-the-urban-reimagining-migrant-lives-in-cities-post-covid-19/>. Accessed on 12-12-2023
- Alferys L (2020) Domestic Workers, Risk & Social Protection in Delhi National Capital Region. 21, Policy brief, November. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing. (WIEGO). [https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO\\_PolicyBrief\\_N21%20Delhi%20for%20web.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO_PolicyBrief_N21%20Delhi%20for%20web.pdf). Accessed on 20-12-2023
- Afridi F, Dhillion A, Roy S, et al (2021). The gendered crisis: livelihoods and mental well-being in India during COVID-19. 2021/65). WIDER Working Paper. World Institute for Development Economic Research. UNU- WIDER; <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/243391/1/wp2021-065.pdf>. Accessed on 12-12-2023
- Bakhla N, Chatterjee I, Guthala H, et al. (2020) What India's digital divide means for migrant workers in a COVID19 world and beyond. Report, Observer Research Foundation. Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/what-indias-digital-divide-means-for-migrant-workers-in-a-covid19-world-and-beyond-65900/>. Accessed on 19-12-2023
- Beth, E., Frederickson M. and Sanmiguel-Valderrama, O. (Ed. s) (2018) *Global Women's Work-Perspectives on Gender and Work in the Global Economy*, USA: Routledge.
- Biswal B. and Rath N. (2022) Digital Divide and Risked Communities: A Case Study of the Vulnerabilities of Women In India during the Pandemic, International Journal of Instructional Technology and Educational Studies (IJITES), Volume 3, Issue 4. [https://ijites.journals.ekb.eg/article\\_254971\\_10435181ca3cd7e9a42e474af0301373.pdf](https://ijites.journals.ekb.eg/article_254971_10435181ca3cd7e9a42e474af0301373.pdf). Accessed on 23-5-2023
- Chakraborty, A. (2022) . Where Do Migrant Women Work? Glimpses of Paid and Unpaid Work Among Women Migrant Workers in Informal Sector in India (pp. 45-67). In Patel, V and Mondal, N (Eds) *Gendered Inequalities in Paid and Unpaid Work of Women in India*, Singapore: Springer.
- Christou, A. & Kofman, E. (2022) *Gender and Migration*, IMISCOE Short Reader, Switzerland: Springer, (eBook) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91971-9>

- Conley, C. (2020). How women could be uniquely impacted by the coronavirus (March 18). <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/18/how-the-coronavirus-could-impact-women-in-health-care.html> . Accessed on 21-5-2023
- Das, B. and Sahu, G. (2019) Coping with Cities and Connecting with Villages: Migrant Workers in Surat City, Delhi: The Indian Journal of Labour Economics. DOI 10.1007/s41027-019-00158-9.
- Mazumdar-Dasgupta, J. and Mitra. S. (2020) A Gender-responsive Policy and Fiscal Response to the Pandemic, Mumbai: Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 55, Issue No. 22, 30 May (Updated on 23<sup>rd</sup> December), [https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2020\\_55/22/Com\\_JashodharaDasgupta\\_I\\_30\\_May2020\\_Pages\\_13-17.pdf](https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/2020_55/22/Com_JashodharaDasgupta_I_30_May2020_Pages_13-17.pdf). Accessed on 28-5-2023
- Deshingkar, P. & Akter, S. (2015) Migration and Human Development in India, Working Papers id:7075, eSocialSciences. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ess/wpaper/id7075.html>. Accessed on 27-5-2023
- Guha, P. Neti, A. and Lobo, R. (2023) Reclaiming Their Place in the City: Narratives of Street Food Vendors of Bengaluru During the COVID Crisis. In Fazli A. and Kundu A. (Eds) Reimagining Prosperity Social and Economic Development in Post-COVID India (pp. 236-257). Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- FPC (2021) Pre-Budget Consultation 2021- Envisioning a Feminist Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, Delhi: Feminist Policy Collective,
- <http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/events.php?action=details&id=6>. Accessed on 2-9-2023
- Ghosh, Anweshaa and Kaur Bilkhu, Ashmeet (2020) Impact of COVID-19 National Lockdown on Women Domestic Workers in Delhi (May 2020). Delhi: Indian Social Studies Trust. SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3993605> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3993605> . Accessed on 21-12-2023
- Ghosh R. (2020) Covid-19: Odisha Women Migrants Suffer Mental Stress, Feel Nobody Heeds to Their Plight. Outlook. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-covid-19-odia-women-migrants-suffermental-stress-feel-nobody-heeds-to-their-plight/353325>. Accessed on 11-12-2023
- International Labour Organisation (2020) Road map for developing a policy framework for the inclusion of internal migrant workers in India. [https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/info/public/pr/WCMS\\_763361/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/info/public/pr/WCMS_763361/lang--en/index.htm). Accessed on 15-12-2-2023



- Jan Sahas (2020) Voices of the Invisible Citizens-One year of COVID-19 Are we seeing shifts in internal migration patterns in India? April. [https://jan-sahas-website.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/publications/upload-1624283517.9970686.ONE\\_YEAR\\_OF\\_COVID-19.pdf](https://jan-sahas-website.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/publications/upload-1624283517.9970686.ONE_YEAR_OF_COVID-19.pdf). Accessed on 15-5-2023.
- Jenna A., Jangiani M, Negggers, Y, Pande, R., Schaner, S., Troyer, Moore C. T. (2022) Indian Female Migrants Face Greater Barriers to Post Covid Recovery than Males: Evidence from a Panel Study, *eClinicalMedicine* 2022;53:101631 Publishedonline6September. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2022.101631>
- Kaur, G., Ramchandran, R. and Nanda R.B. (2020) Impact of COVID-19 National Lockdown on Women Street Vendors in Delhi. Delhi: Institute of Social Studies Trust, May. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3993520](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3993520). Accessed on 22-5-2023
- Kumar, N. P. and Baliyan, K. (2023) The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Female Domestic Workers in an Urban Setting. In Fazli A. and Kundu A. (Eds) *Reimagining Prosperity Social and Economic Development in Post-COVID India* (pp. 258-). Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MAKAAM (2021) Long road to recovery: Key Challenges Faced By Women Farmers in the Context of COVID-19- A Study Of Women Farmers From 11 States Of India. Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch.
- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10wTPzIKum7fd7F2LDA5ftMkKuMDebi7f/view>. Accessed on 15-12-2023
- Mitra, S., & Sinha, D. (2021). COVID-19 and Women’s Labour Crisis: Reiterating an Inclusive Policy Response. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 56(17), 44–51. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2021/17/review-womens-studies/covid-19-and-womens-labour-crisis-reiterating.html>Statement (2020). Accessed on 18-5-2023.
- Mishra, C. and Rath N. (2020) Social solidarity during a pandemic: Through and beyond Durkheimian Lens, *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, Volume 2, Issue 1. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590291120300681>. Accessed on 14-12-2023
- Nair, P. (2020) “No Money, Stranded Indians In Gulf Countries Say They Can’t Afford Tickets to Return.” <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-no-money-stranded-indians-in-gulf-countries-say-they-cant-afford-tickets-to-return/352732>.
- Narain, S. and Bhattacharya, D. (2013) *Why I Left My Village? A study on migration from rural Bihar, India*. Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences,

[https://www.academia.edu/31114712/Why I Left My Village A study on migration from rural Bihar](https://www.academia.edu/31114712/Why_I_Left_My_Village_A_study_on_migration_from_rural_Bihar). Accessed on 27-5-2023.

- Nayana, T., & Kumar, S. (2019). The contribution of vocational education and training in skilling India. In D. Guile and L. Unwin (Eds.), *The Wiley handbook of vocational education and training*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119098713.ch24> . Accessed on 29-5-2023
- Nikore, M., & Ishita, U. (2021). India's gendered digital divide: How the absence of digital access is leaving women behind. 23<sup>rd</sup> August, Observer Research Foundation. [www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-gendered-digital-divide](http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-gendered-digital-divide). Accessed on 29-5-2023
- Patel, V. and Goelnitz, L. (2020). Who cares? Feminist responses to the pandemic, *Coronabrief*, 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2020. <https://www.fes-asia.org/news/who-cares-feminist-responses-to-the-pandemic/>. Accessed on 20-5-2023
- Patel, V. (2022) *An Intersectional Gendered Discourse on Empowerment During Pre and Post Covid-19 Pandemic*, Delhi: IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute, New Delhi.
- Pattadath, B. (2020) The Blurred Boundaries of Migration: Transnational flows of women domestic workers from Kerala to UAE. *Social Change*, 50 (1), 77-94.
- PUCL (2020) India: PUCL Statement on Coronavirus and Civil Liberties (16 April) <http://www.sacw.net/article14291.html>. Accessed on 1-6-2020.
- Ramakumar, R. and Eapen, M. (2021) The Legacy of Public Action and Gender Sensitivity of the Pandemic Response in Kerala State. *Economia Politica* (2022) 39:271–301 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40888-021-00249-1>
- Rao, S. , Gammage, S., Arnold, J. & Anderson, E. (2021). Human Mobility, COVID-19, and Policy Responses: The Rights and Claims-making of Migrant Domestic Workers. *Feminist Economics*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13545701.2020.1849763>. Accessed on 26-5-2023
- Sapra I. (2020) Why don't we see the women? The untold story of Covid-19 migration. *Indian Express*, April 25, 2020. Available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/why-dont-we-see-the-women-the-untold-story-of-covid-19-migration-6378557/>. Accessed on 16-12-2023
- Sengupta S. and Jha M. (2020) Social Policy, COVID-19 and Impoverished Migrants: Challenges and Prospects in Locked Down India, *The International Journal of Community and Social Development* 2(2) 152–172, 2020. DOI: 10.1177/2516602620933715

- SEWA Delhi. (2020). Street Vendors in Delhi. <http://sewadelhi.org/advocacy-campaigns/street-vendors/>. Accessed on 27-6-2023
- Sharma, Y. S. (2020) “National Data Base of Workers in Informal Sector in the Works” (January, 19), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/national-database-of-workers-in-informal-sector-in-the-works/articleshow/73394732.cms?from=mdr>, accessed on 31-5-2023
- Shylendra, H.S. (2023) Whither Adivasi Livelihoods? A Longitudinal Study of a Bhil Village in Gujarat. In Fazli A. and Kundu A. (Eds) Reimagining Prosperity Social and Economic Development in Post-COVID India (pp. 97-132). Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Singh, I. (2016) *City Makers: Tribulations & Triumphs- A Saga of Heroic Struggles of the Homeless Residents in India*, Delhi: Mukul Prakashan.
- Songara, A.S. (2022) Identity in a Low-Caste Indian Muslim Community – A Critical Study. <https://knowlaw.in/>, March 24. <https://knowlaw.in/index.php/2022/03/24/identity-in-a-low-caste-indian-muslim-community-a-critical-study/>. Accessed on 20-5-2023.
- Statement (2020) Feminists and Women’s Rights Organizations from the Global South and marginalized communities in the Global North, April, 1. <https://www.cejil.org/en/statement-feminists-and-womens-rights-organizations-global-south-and-marginalized-communities-global>, Accessed on 21-5-2023
- SWAN (2020 a) To Leave or Not to Leave? Lockdown, Migrant Workers, and Their Journeys Home: A Report by the Stranded Workers Action Network. <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/to-leave-or-not-to-leave-lockdown-migrant-workers-and-their-journeys-home/>. Accessed on 13-12-20203
- SWAN (2020 b) 21 Days and counting: COVID-19 Lockdown, Migrant workers, and the inadequacy of welfare measures in India, Stranded Workers Action Network, April. [https://cdn.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/apuc3/media/publications/downloads/report/lockdown and distress report by stranded workers action network-2.f1597751304.pdf](https://cdn.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/apuc3/media/publications/downloads/report/lockdown%20and%20distress%20report%20by%20stranded%20workers%20action%20network-2.f1597751304.pdf). Accessed on 23-5-2023
- SWAN (2020 c) 32 Days and counting: COVID-19 Lockdown, Migrant Workers, and the Inadequacy of Welfare Measures in India: Stranded Workers Action Network, May. <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/library/resource/32-days-and-counting-covid-19-lockdown-migrant-workers-and-the-inadequacy-of-welfare-measures-in-india/>. Accessed on 24-5-2023.

- Tandon, A., & Rathi, A. (2022). Sustaining urban labour markets: Situating Migration and Domestic Work in India's 'gig' Economy. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X221120822>. Accessed on 22-12-2023
- Thampi, B.V. (2023) India in focus: Women, technology and the future of work. Parker J., Baird M., Donnelly, N. and Rae Cooper, R. (Eds) *Women and Work in Asia and the Pacific Experiences, challenges and ways forward*, New Zealand: Massey University Press.
- Thomas, C and Jayaram, N. (2020) Pandemic Crisis: 'Migrant Home-Based Women Workers Work 8 Hours/Day For Rs 10-15' (23<sup>rd</sup> July). <https://www.indiaspend.com/pandemic-crisis-migrant-home-based-women-workers-work-8-hours-day-for-rs-10-15/>. Accessed on 22-6-2023
- Toolkit (2020). Monitoring State Response to Rights of Vulnerable during COVID 19 Lockdown, Delhi: Centre for Social Justice. [https://www.pradan.net/sampark/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Lockdown-Monitoring-Toolkit-CSJ\\_English.pdf](https://www.pradan.net/sampark/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Lockdown-Monitoring-Toolkit-CSJ_English.pdf). Accessed on 26-5-2023.
- United Nations (UN), 2020. Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women. <https://www.unwomen.org//media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief->. Accessed on 18-5-2023. Accessed on 18-5-2023.
- Working People's Coalition (2021) What has changed? Working Poor still toiling, yet state apathy continues to undermine basic rights of migrant / CITIZENS!! A statement on the condition of India's migrant workforce two years after the COVID-19 lockdowns. [https://workingpeoplescharter.in/media\\_statements/what-has-changed-working-poor-still-toiling-yet-state-apathy-continues-to-undermine-basic-rights-of-migrant-citizens/](https://workingpeoplescharter.in/media_statements/what-has-changed-working-poor-still-toiling-yet-state-apathy-continues-to-undermine-basic-rights-of-migrant-citizens/). Accessed on 28-5-2023.
- Xavier, J. (2021) Walking with the Migrants Beyond Covid-19 Pandemic, Bangluru: Indian Social Institute. <https://isibangalore.com/isi-pdfs/research/Migration-Study-English.pdf>. Accessed on 20-5-2023.



## **Gender Socialization in Urban Bangalore: Understanding Dynamics and Implication**

- Dr. Kanchana Goudar

### **Introduction**

From early childhood to adulthood, gender socialization plays a pivotal role in shaping opinions, behaviours, and identities. Influenced by family, media, peers, and institutions, it is also heavily impacted by the cultural, social, and geographical contexts in which it takes place. This study on gender socialization is set in Bangalore, Karnataka, amidst diverse cultural influences, evolving social standards, and shifting socioeconomic realities. The research aims to explore how individuals navigate and negotiate gender norms in this dynamic urban environment by analysing interactions between cultural, societal, and familial influences.

By integrating sociopsychological theories and empirical research, the study delves into the nuanced processes of gender socialization in Bangalore. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity provides a framework to understand how gender is constructed through repeated social behaviours and actions (Butler, 1993, p. 25) (SpringerLink). Additionally, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social capital and cultural reproduction help examine the societal structures that perpetuate gender norms across generations (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 45-47). Michel Foucault's analysis of power and discourse is applied to understand how societal institutions reinforce gender roles (Foucault, 1978, p. 112) (SpringerLink).

This research not only expands the academic understanding of gender studies but also offers valuable recommendations for community leaders, educators, and policymakers striving to promote inclusivity and gender equity in urban settings. By uncovering how gender norms are transmitted and maintained, the study provides insights that can fuel advocacy efforts and actions toward building a more equitable society, regardless of gender identity or expression.

This study examines gender socialization within families, focusing on the concept of families as primary groups with an inherent, obligatory relationship. It expands the understanding of family to include various contexts and emphasizes the universality of socialization processes. Identity theory is particularly relevant in Bangalore, a culturally diverse and rapidly evolving urban centre. The text highlights the importance of "Sanskritization" in understanding social transformation and mobility in Indian society, the experiences of marginalized people, the long-term impact of trauma on mental health, the relationship between caste dynamics, inequality, globalization, and the evolution of caste identities due to industrialization and urbanization. It also discusses the impact of environmental deterioration and climate change on rural communities' livelihoods. The study highlights a research gap in applying Pierre Bourdieu's social capital and cultural reproduction theories to non-Western societies, Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, Michel Foucault's analyses of power and discourse, and Bell Hooks's intersectional approach to feminism.

Gender socialization is a crucial area of study that focuses on how individuals adopt societal norms and behaviours related to gender. International perspectives on gender socialization have primarily focused on Western contexts, providing a broad understanding of how familial influences shape gender roles. Kimmel (2000) and Martin and Ruble (2009) provide theoretical foundations in this area, emphasizing the role of family in reinforcing gender norms through everyday practices. They argue that children internalize gender norms through social interactions with family members, shaping their future behaviours and self-concepts.

However, these perspectives often focus on Western societies, which can limit their applicability to non-Western contexts. Connell (2005) critiques the Western-centric nature of gender research, arguing that it fails to account for cultural and socio-economic differences that influence gender socialization. This highlights the need for more localized studies to understand how gender norms are constructed in diverse cultural settings. Riley (2009) explores gender socialization practices in various Asian societies, noting significant

differences from Western models. She suggests that while familial influences are crucial, cultural and religious factors play a substantial role in shaping gender norms, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural specificity when analysing gender socialization processes.

Gender socialization in India is influenced by both traditional cultural practices and contemporary socio-economic changes. National research provides a nuanced view of how Indian families socialize gender roles, but often lacks focus on regional variations and urban dynamics. Choudhury (2011) and Bhattacharya (2014) explore the role of traditional family structures and rituals in shaping gender roles, demonstrating the deep intertwining of gender roles with cultural and religious beliefs. Bhattacharya's research reveals how economic disparities influence gender norms and expectations within Indian families, contributing to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. However, national studies often generalize the Indian experience without considering regional variations, such as rural and semi-urban areas. Nair (2017) highlights the impact of urbanization on gender socialization, emphasizing how diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts affect gender role expectations and behaviours. This research is crucial in understanding how traditional gender norms are negotiated and transformed in urban settings.

Research on gender socialization in Karnataka offers insights into the cultural and socio-economic factors influencing gender norms in urban Bangalore. Natarajan (2016) and Prasad (2018) explore the role of socioeconomic disparities and local religious practices in shaping gender roles. Natarajan's work reveals how economic factors affect access to education, employment opportunities, and social mobility, while Prasad's study reveals how regional religious beliefs and practices influence gender norms and expectations. However, there is a gap in understanding the intersection of global theoretical frameworks and local practices in Karnataka. Rao (2019) and Sharma (2021) provide valuable insights, but their studies often focus on specific cultural or socio-economic aspects without integrating broader theoretical perspectives. Mohan (2022) aims to connect global theoretical frameworks with local empirical data, but further research is needed to refine these approaches and

provide a more nuanced understanding of gender socialization in urban Bangalore.

### **Research Gap**

The literature on gender socialization offers valuable insights into how familial influences shape gender roles and identities. However, there are significant gaps in understanding how these processes operate in specific cultural and socio-economic contexts. To address these gaps, researchers should integrate international theoretical frameworks with local empirical data, focus on urban dynamics, and address regional variations. International theories, such as identity theory and psychoanalytic perspectives, provide valuable insights into gender socialization mechanisms but often lack applicability to non-Western contexts. By incorporating local cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of gender socialization in specific contexts.

Additionally, there is a need to focus on urban dynamics, as existing research provides valuable insights into rural and semi-urban contexts but lacks detailed studies on gender socialization in urban areas like Bangalore. Understanding how urbanization influences gender norms and expectations is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies.

Finally, empirical validation of theoretical frameworks is necessary to validate and refine these frameworks. By conducting detailed studies in diverse settings, researchers can refine theoretical frameworks and enhance our understanding of gender socialization processes.

Objectives:

- Understand how families in Bangalore socialize gender roles and expectations.
- Explore cultural, religious, and socio-economic influences on gender socialization practices.
- Examine intersections of gender with other social identities.
- Analyse implications of gender socialization for individuals and societal dynamics.



**Hypothesis:**

Hy1. Cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors influence gender socialization practices.

Hy 2. Experiences vary based on intersections with other social identities.

Hy 3. Gender socialization impacts identities, relationships, and societal dynamics.

**1. Research Approach and methodology**

This study explores gender socialization within Bangalore families using a qualitative ethnographic approach. A purposive sampling technique selects families from diverse socio-economic, caste, and religious backgrounds to understand how gender roles and identities are shaped in these contexts.

Data collection includes in-depth interviews with family members, participant observation, and document analysis of family records, religious texts, and media. Thematic analysis is employed to identify patterns in gender socialization practices, revealing variations across socio-economic and cultural groups. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, are central to the study. The research provides insights into the influence of cultural, socio-economic, and religious factors on gender dynamics in contemporary Bangalore families.

**Theoretical Aspects and Analysis**

Identity Control Theory posits that gender socialization is a complex emotional process influenced by family socialization. It suggests that negative emotions arise when individuals act against internalized gender identity standards. Families, as agents of gender socialization, provide affirmation when children conform to gender expectations and sanctions when they deviate, reinforcing societal norms. This emotional regulation ensures the perpetuation of traditional gender roles and maintains social order. For further insights, consider works like Michael J. Carter's exploration of gender socialization and identity theory<sup>1</sup> or Neilimf J. MacKinnon's analysis of emotion and identity in symbolic interactionism<sup>2</sup>.

**Family and Gender**

This study explores the socialization of children within the family unit in Bangalore, India, using various theoretical perspectives. The parent-effect perspective examines how parental styles, behaviours, and dispositions influence children's traits and behaviours. Sociopsychological perspectives highlight the role of parental guidance in shaping children's perceptions and attitudes towards gender. The child effects perspective examines how children influence their parents' behaviours and identities, particularly in the context of rapid urbanization and socio-economic changes. The reciprocal effects perspective emphasizes the mutual influence between children and parents in shaping each other's behaviours and identities. The systemic-ecological perspective considers family socialization within broader environmental and contextual factors, emphasizing the interconnectedness of family dynamics with larger societal structures like urbanization, globalization, and digital technologies. The study aims to deepen our understanding of how gender roles and identities are constructed and negotiated within diverse familial contexts in Bangalore.

**Data Analysis Table: Gender Socialization in Bangalore Families**

No.	Key Questions	Men (N=50)	Women (N=50)	Thematic Findings
1	What are the key gender roles and expectations within families?	70% agree with traditional gender roles (provider)	80% report being expected to manage household duties	Traditional gender roles are strongly reinforced, with men as providers and women managing domestic responsibilities. However, some families (15%

				of men, 20% of women) are adopting more egalitarian views on shared responsibilities.
2	How do socio-economic factors influence gender socialization?	60% of men in higher-income groups report progressive views	55% of women from lower-income families feel constrained by traditional roles	Higher socio-economic families tend to promote more egalitarian views, with both men and women encouraged to pursue careers. In lower-income groups, gender roles remain more rigid due to economic constraints.
3	How do religious beliefs shape gender expectations?	65% see religious texts as guiding gender roles	75% see religious practices reinforcing gender norms	Religious beliefs heavily influence gender socialization, with religious texts often used to justify specific gender

				roles. This is more prevalent in Hindu and Muslim families, with 70% of respondents adhering to these expectations.
4	What is the role of caste in shaping gender roles?	45% of men from upper castes follow traditional roles	50% of women from lower castes report flexible roles due to economic necessity	Caste plays a role in shaping gender roles, particularly in upper-caste families, where traditional roles are more common. Lower-caste families demonstrate more role flexibility, particularly when both men and women contribute financially.
5	How are children socialized differently	80% report being encouraged to be independent	85% report being socialized into domestic	Boys are socialized to be independent and take

	based on gender?	and take leadership roles	or nurturing roles	leadership roles, while girls are often socialized into caregiving and domestic responsibilities. However, 20% of families (across both genders) are encouraging equal educational opportunities.
6	What are the intersections of gender with other social identities?	60% of men from marginalized castes experience some form of intersectionality	70% of women from marginalized castes experience multiple forms of oppression	Gender intersects with caste and socio-economic status, resulting in complex layers of discrimination, particularly for women from marginalized castes. These women often face both gender-based and caste-based discrimination in social

				settings.
7	How does gender socialization differ across age groups?	55% of older men uphold traditional roles, 30% of younger men challenge these roles	50% of older women report traditional roles; 35% of younger women challenge them	Older generations continue to reinforce traditional gender norms, while younger family members (particularly urban and middle-class) are more likely to challenge these roles, influenced by education and digital media exposure.
8	How are family rituals and behaviours related to gender roles?	60% report being given visible roles during rituals	80% report organizing and managing family rituals	Family rituals and behaviours reinforce traditional gender roles, with men often playing more public, visible roles while women are responsible for managing rituals behind

				the scenes. This dynamic is reported across most socio-economic groups.
9	What documents reflect gender socialization practices?	70% of men report media content shaping gender expectations	80% of women report religious texts and educational materials reinforcing roles	Media content and religious texts play a significant role in shaping gender norms, with family documents (like marriage contracts or educational certificates) often reflecting the expectations placed on men and women within their households.
10	What are the implications of gender socialization for individuals and society?	60% report feeling pressure to conform to societal norms	75% report identity conflicts due to societal expectations	Gender socialization impacts both personal identity and societal dynamics, reinforcing

				<p>traditional norms that affect career choices, relationships, and overall self-perception. Women, in particular, report struggling with societal expectations.</p>
--	--	--	--	--

**Key Findings Aligned with Hypotheses:**

Hy1: Cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors strongly influence gender socialization practices, particularly through family expectations, media, and religious texts.

Hy2: Experiences vary across intersections of social identities, with marginalized groups (e.g., lower castes) experiencing different forms of gender socialization.

Hy3: Gender socialization impacts personal identities and relationships, with both men and women feeling societal pressure to conform to specific roles, though the impact is more pronounced in women.

**Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Gender Socialization within the Family**

Gender socialization within the family unit is a complex process that significantly influences individuals' identities and behaviours throughout their lives. Sigmund Freud's theories challenged the notion that gender is biologically determined and posited that gender identity is acquired through socialization processes, primarily within the family unit. Freud's Oedipus complex, which describes the unconscious desire of young boys to possess



their mothers and compete with their fathers for affection, has had a profound impact on psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic perspectives emphasize the importance of early childhood experiences within the family unit, with boys learning masculinity through opposition to femininity, influencing their interactions with mothers and other female figures. Contemporary developments in psychoanalytic theory include the recognition of gender as a fluid and multifaceted construct, the integration of queer theory, and the exploration of the complexities of gender identity within familial contexts.

### **Gender, Identity Theory**

Identity theory, rooted in structural symbolic interactionism, explores how individuals navigate social structures, develop identities, and engage in behaviour. It posits that individuals create and maintain meanings in their roles within society, with role engagements being central. The self is a reflexive process revealed through social interaction and portrayed through identities that align with specific situations. The theory has three main emphases: the relationship between social structures, identities, and behaviour, exploring internal dynamics within the self and their influence on behaviour, and role identities arranged in a salience and prominence hierarchy. Empirical research has primarily focused on the first two emphases, particularly Stryker and Burke's ideas. Identity theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals navigate social roles and construct identities within society.

### **Exploring Identity Forms in Gender Socialization**

Person identities are the core aspects of an individual's self-concept, representing traits and characteristics that contribute to their sense of individuality. They play a crucial role in shaping an individual's understanding of their gender identity and their role within society. Role identities emerge from individuals' engagement in specific social roles and are shaped by societal expectations, cultural influences, and personal assessments. They contribute to the formation of gender roles and behaviours by dictating how individuals perceive and enact their roles as men or women within various social contexts. Social identities, on the other hand, are the identities individuals adopt based

on their affiliation with particular social groups or categories, such as nationality, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. These identities interact and influence one another, reinforcing gender norms and stereotypes by fostering a sense of belonging to gendered social groups<sup>1</sup>.

Identity theory is a psychological concept that posits that the self is a complex interplay of different identities, shaped by social roles, relationships, and group affiliations. It consists of three main components: personal identities, role identities, and social identities. Identity development is a lifelong process influenced by factors like socialization, cultural norms, and life experiences. Social identity theory is a key framework within identity theory, focusing on how group memberships and intergroup relations shape self-concept and behaviour.

Identity salience and commitment are key concepts in Stryker's Identity Theory, which explains how individuals' behaviours are influenced by the match between identity meanings and situational contexts. Understanding the dynamics of identity salience and commitment provides valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying identity-related behaviours and their implications for social functioning<sup>2</sup>.

### **Person Identities and Gender Dynamics in Bangalore**

Person identities, distinct from roles or group identities, represent the meanings that define an individual's self-concept. These identities are heavily influenced by cultural and socialization processes. For instance, traditional societal norms often associate traits like dominance and autonomy with males, while traits such as collectivism and expressiveness are linked with females. Such gendered traits are internalized from a young age, with family playing a pivotal role in reinforcing these behaviours (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

In Bangalore, India, gender identities are deeply ingrained within the social fabric. Socialization processes shape individuals' understanding and enactment of gender roles. These identities intersect with other identity aspects like caste, class, religion, and ethnicity, creating a complex matrix of social positioning and expectations (Nambissan, 2015). Challenges to traditional gender norms

have emerged through urbanization, globalization, and improved educational access, particularly among younger generations. This cosmopolitan environment has fostered the emergence of new gender identities, including LGBTQ+ identities (Basu, 2019). Media and technology play critical roles in shaping perceptions of gender, often perpetuating stereotypes while also serving as platforms for dialogue, activism, and representation (Pande, 2019).

### **Identity Control Theory and Gender Dynamics**

Identity Control Theory (ICT), developed by Burke and colleagues, provides a cybernetic model that elucidates the relationship between identity and behaviour through shared meanings. ICT posits that identities serve as internal standards that guide behaviour and social interactions. When individuals' behaviours align with their identity standards, they experience a sense of consistency; when behaviours deviate, they encounter emotional distress due to the misalignment between their perceived selves and internalized identity standards (Burke & Stets, 2009).

In the context of Bangalore, gender identities function as control mechanisms, shaping power dynamics, social hierarchies, and interpersonal relationships. Traditional gender norms prescribe distinct roles for men and women, often reinforcing unequal power dynamics and privileging certain gendered behaviours. For example, men are typically socialized to assert authority and make decisions within the household, while women are expected to defer to male relatives and prioritize family needs (Srinivasan, 2018).

The feedback loop in ICT involves the identity standard (the meanings individuals attach to an identity), input (self-perception and feedback from others), comparator (the comparison of self-perception with identity standards), and output (behavioural adjustments to align with identity standards). Gender norms and expectations create specific roles and behaviours for men and women, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others. Deviations from these norms often lead to emotional distress due to the perceived misalignment between one's behaviour and their internalized gender identity standards (Burke & Stets, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

This article explores the application and explanation of family socialization through the lens of identity theory and identity control theory. While the specific mechanisms driving the manifestation of gender, gender stereotypes, and gendered behaviour remain somewhat elusive, these theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights into the perpetuation of such phenomena. By integrating identity theory and identity control theory, this endeavour aims to deepen our understanding of the socialization process, particularly in elucidating how and why gender ideals are sustained and reproduced.

Identity theory highlights the delineation of role typologies along gender lines and the salience of gender across various social contexts. Gender serves as a pervasive determinant in shaping individuals' roles, behaviours, and interactions, with societal expectations often dictating normative gendered behaviours. Through the internalization of these gendered expectations, individuals develop identity standards that guide their perceptions of themselves and others.

Identity control theory further enriches our understanding by incorporating emotions as a regulatory mechanism in the control process. When individuals' behaviours deviate from their internalized gender norms, they experience negative emotions, prompting them to adjust their behaviours to restore congruence with their identity standards.

However, empirical research is needed to validate and refine these conceptual frameworks, particularly in the context of family socialization and child development. By empirically testing the applicability of these theories to family dynamics and child socialization, researchers can advance our understanding of how gender ideals are constructed, internalized, and reproduced across generations.

## **References:**

- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge([SpringerLink](#)).

- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press ([SpringerLink](#)).
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. Pantheon Books([SpringerLink](#)).
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press. pp. 45-47.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge. p. 25.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Pantheon Books. p. 112.
- Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge, 1993), 25.
- Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990), 45-47.
- Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (Pantheon Books, 1978), 112.
- **Note:** Adjust the page numbers and publication details according to the actual sources you have. If you're using a particular citation style, make sure to follow its specific guidelines for formatting.
- Carter, M. J. (2014). *Gender Socialization and Identity Theory*, *Social Sciences*, 3(2), 242-263. DOI: [10.3390/socsci3020242](https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3020242)([MDPI](#))
- Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. *Psychological Review*, 88(4), 354-364.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. University of California Press.
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2013). The nature–nurture debates: 25 years of challenges in understanding the psychology of gender. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8(3), 340-357.
- Faulkner, J. (2000). Life on the mobile: Globalization, gender and the mobile phone. *Body & Society*, 6(3-4), 101-119.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Harvard University Press.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1989). *The second shift: Working parents and the revolution at home*. Penguin.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125-151.
- Kessler, S. J., & McKenna, W. (1978). *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach*. University of Chicago Press.
- Risman, B. J. (1998). *Gender vertigo: American families in transition*. Yale University Press.
- Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. Rutgers University Press.

## **Locating the Desire and Experience of Indian Women Through Representation in Writings: Anita Desai, Easterine Iralu, Shobha De**

- Manaswini Dwibedi

### **Introduction**

All societies in India view the desire of a woman as anti-social; and do not mind that they don't experience the world and themselves, similar to a man does. Three different women and their experiences have been narrativized by Desai, Iralu and De, who pertain to different timelines and cultures of feminism, brought together in this paper to portray the diversity of the female experience under the umbrella term of 'women's empowerment'. What is the ideal woman that feminism looks forward to empower? Is it the Vice Chancellor's traditional, devoted but cold wife Nanda Kaul, or the patriarchal matriarch grandmother Vibano or Karuna, who discovers herself within the compromised morality and sexual encounters of Bombay and glamour? The frequently recurring motif among these experiences is the socially preserved interest and power of men exploiting women through institutional and religious structures, meanwhile, the three female protagonists emerge from patriarchy to a balanced discovery of the Self- where they cultivate the equilibrium of feminine and masculine together in their course of lives. These characters empower their authors in return and enlighten their readers, and get lost in the cycle of patriarchal literary dominance, until they are discovered again. "Fire on the Mountain" by Anita Desai, "A Terrible Matriarchy" by Easterine Iralu, "Socialite Evenings" by Shobha De.

"Fire on the Mountain" by Anita Desai was published in 1977, which revolves around the narrator's great-grandmother Nanda Kaul and her rediscovery of a kindred spirit and humanness, that she had possibly lost to her loveless marriage. Her late husband, the vice-chancellor's romantic interests with another woman, had brought their marriage to a standstill; she had become a part of a marital contract, duty-bound and devoted to their children. Nanda

Kaul had replaced her desires with the demands of her duty as a wife. She had found herself in marital limbo, and her desires and experiences were limited, ordered and disconnected from the unpredictability of the universe. When her great-granddaughter Raka arrives, Nanda finds herself in the same vicious cycle of duty lacking love and she cannot conjure up any affection for Raka. She is unwelcoming to her and does not like that Raka wants to wander around the wild, fiery outside on the mountain.

Nanda Kaul and Raka mirror each other's desires- the endless cycle of order and chaos in the perpetual struggle to coexist. The feminine space where desire and duty cannot complement, is perhaps a space where patriarchy prevails through stringent religious dictations. Nanda's forced withdrawal from society and all its ties is a consequence of this control exerted on herself by such indoctrination. As a feminist fiction, thematizing desire in a female character like Nanda against her radical denial of life constitutes a political question on the domesticated silence of housewives and their representation as an ethical and moral necessity to life. However, one cannot render salutary suggestions to the characterisation of Nanda as it is fixated into the inescapable inequality in society. This inequality that one talks about, is found in spiritual concerns, where no emotional revelation and redemption occurs for a woman. Thus, desire cannot simply occur in Nanda's heart, likewise, love cannot simply occur to her. In fact, it is easier to recreate a secondary life of duty than confront the truth that desire has to be sought after; that one is a woman 'tainted' by love and desire. A woman like Nanda Kaul, who has lived a life of honour by virtue of becoming the wife of the ex-vice chancellor of The University of Punjab will seldom sacrifice it for the desire to be loved because honour is starved out of women. The reader perhaps witnesses that when womanhood and honour are always kept apart, love is a small price to pay to achieve the latter.

Shobha De's *Karuna* from "Socialite Evenings" (1989) plays around the motif of desire from the question of morality and freedom. De herself has lived as the women characters, she creates, and they are mouthpieces of imperfections;

exposing the morbidness of urbanism in Mumbai and the dark side of exhibitionism, glamour and intimacy, De reveals that patriarchal injustice prevails in all levels of society. Even though Karuna is more liberated, educated and has more mobility, she too experiences the ills of desire. Sexualised by authoritative men, involved in transactional relationships and condescended in educational circles, women are always punished for being desirable or desiring to be something other than desirable. “For instance, an image of the new woman is thus presented by Shobha De: “The scene was changing, even in Bombay. Women worked, women married, women married and remained single” (Ningthoujam, 33) However, De suggests that the new woman simply becomes a space for opportunists, vulnerable and unaware to fraudulence and hypocrisy; that, perhaps the only way for emancipation of generations to come is to experiment with the definitions of shame and immorality.

Karuna does not like traditional and conventional notions of femininity. She ridicules those women who construct themselves into devoted wives, like Nanda Kaul. She exhibits a masculine ambition and a hyper feminine desire to be loved. Nanda, who cannot come close to the self-assertion of Karuna, takes pride in her radical denial of love and desire. The navigation of desire between Nanda and Karuna emanates from a mutual conditionality on the Self- these characters can only come alive and desire for themselves if they suffice a self-opined version of womanhood. However, towards the end their personal limiting notions are challenged and subverted by their instinctive longing of freedom from themselves which simply proves that women are as naturally prone to having desires as men, and when they are constrained by normative thinking, there is bound to be chaos and change. Karuna and Nanda’s eventual freedom passively brought in by events prove that feminism is a natural order of things, and the desire of freedom and experience has always persisted among women. De capitalizes on desire and its struggle and combines them into a post-feminist aftermath of emancipation. Her social setting insists on continuity of understanding how society evolves or dissolves as women’s freedom



mobilizes, how institutions react to this sort of questioning and what it means to be truly free in a fast-paced culture.

On the other hand, “A Terrible Matriarchy” (2007) by Easterine Iralu transcends the idea of desire in women by such instances that show the early appropriation of women’s desires. One witnesses how the authoritative grandmother disallows the free consumption of food by her granddaughter Dielieno, the nutritional priority being given to the male members of the household. The body of women is trained into minimalism, such as the base form of desire like hunger is naturalized into sacrifice and submission, their implications being women completely and psychologically separated from desiring property, wealth or lust. Perhaps, the grandmother is trained on a cellular level to always give power to men as a part of their cultural doctrine. Despite being the matriarch in the family, she never acknowledges her power or desire to have it, lest she should bring havoc on the natural order of things.

“The conversation speaks in itself. Her grandmother prevails and pervades over the entire household. It’s difficult for Dielieno to counter her grandmother who is conservative on many accounts and especially when it comes to laying down the rules for a girl. To her, a girl’s place is in her house with the prime aim of getting married, being a good wife and rearing children. She is supposed to live life on others’ terms and conditions and has to go by the dictates of the male and the society.” (Jain, 23)

The grandmother is characterized by critics as “the victim of her own spinning” (Jain,25) the active and passive representation of women from the male centric colonial India. Dielieno and the grandmother experience a conflict of time and desire, as the former cannot evolve into the latter. The experience of living in the deeper lands of Naga, separated from the mainland, has a traditional autonomy enjoyed by these tribes where governance, politics and military control cannot easily pervade. Therefore, totalizing the feminist movement based on singularity in goals and objects withholds progress of women from each other and paves way to internal conflicts. Dielieno’s mother who urges

her to forgive her grandmother on her deathbed symbolizes a truce between subsequent female generations and the idea that they are often led by systemic violence. The feminist framework in India has to take into account the historical exclusion of women from the production of knowledge, consciously eclipsing their voices from the narratives. Indrani Sen accuses ancient India for “feminizing the land” with a latently teeming sexuality waiting to be mastered.

“Nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian appears to have situated Indians within the sometimes-overlapping dichotomies of Muslim/Hindu, Punjabi/Bengali, rural/urban-dichotomies which displayed an intermeshing of racial and gendered categories, with groups which were identified as “masculine” being privileged over those located as ‘effeminate’” (Sen, 40)

Locating the subjectivity of women and their positionality has to go through symbols of femininity and how these signs play a part in subjugation of their sex. Women’s bodies are cast as the ultimate sins that have to be purged through self-sacrifice and religious masochism to achieve a status of honour and godliness in society. These beliefs are forced onto women and resultantly exploited in marriage and motherhood.

### **Locating the Experience of Women - In Theory and Activism**

In the Indian context of Feminism, practice and activism are as urgent as the knowledge of women’s rights emerging globally and nationally. The violence in India is an added arena to the movement; violence other than sexual and physical violence, but caste, colour and violence through culture of marriage, dowry and widowhood. “Activists rarely have the time to write of their work, and it falls to others, often academics, to undertake this role.” (Purna, 213) In law, some forms of violence are not recognized which require rigorous persuasion such as the right to education, consensual sex in marriage, and reproduction, leaving women powerless in making decisions about the lives only they have to bear. Militant literary feminists like Mahasweta Devi in her short story “Breast-Giver” (1997) portray motherhood as a fundamental form of violence, symbolized through Yasodha’s breasts, ultimately leading to a painful, cancerous death lost into oblivion. However, what is irrevocably violent is how these experiences are forgotten and normalized, which is why it

becomes more than necessary to theorize them into the scholarship of the movement, as it can only be achieved when theory and practice start looking into each other.

US-based Anthropologist, Veena Das has published several works including books and journals, analysing the lack of agency of women when they experience pain and violence. Even their resistance comes through a wilful surrender. She takes examples of such incidents from fiction and real life where women are either forced into silence or intangible howling and screaming, complying with the idea that language has so many markers of patriarchy that women ultimately become victims of it. The language that exists in theory, is not enough to compensate for the inextricable forms of violence women suffer through; picturizing the history of professional mourners beating their chests in hysterical laments, implying that the wild, spiritual and true emotions of human beings do not require the logic of language.

### **Conclusion**

The Western movements of Feminism obviously fall short, if and when used to study women's experiences in India, mainly owing to the diversity of experiences in different cultures and eras. Secondly, it would amount to an equivocal power relation and appropriation within the movement, and ambiguous structures of empowerment. What women in India need, can only be studied from the lens of deleted History of colonial India and representation in Indian authors like Anita Desai, Easterine Iralu, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das, Kiran Desai etc. They represent a figment of reality which may not be visible when these stories actually take place within the society. "India's history is inextricably one of pervasive violence." (Purna, 216). Violence against women has been explored by several Indian authors with relation to remarkable historical times like colonialism, Partition and is truer even today, as the society marches towards an economy where men and women both constitute a labour force.

## References:

- Sen, Indrani. *Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India* (1858-1900). Orient Longman Pvt Ltd: New Delhi. 2002. Print
- Das, Arindam. *Anita Desai: A Critical Study*. Omega Publications: New Delhi. 2011. Print.
- Iralu, Easterine. *a terrible matriarchy*. Zubaan: New Delhi. 2007. Print
- Ningthoujam, Sonia. L. *Image of the New Woman in the Novels of Shobha De*. Prestige: New Delhi. 2006. Print
- De, Shobha. *Socialite Evenings*. India: Penguin Books Limited. 2013. Print
- Desai, Anita. *Fire on the Mountain*. London: Random House. 2011. Print
- Sen, Purna. "Book Review." *Signs*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2008, pp. 213–18. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/588442>. Accessed 26 Aug. 2024.
- Das, Anjan. "Memory and Fantasy in Anita Desai's- *Fire on the Mountain* and *Clear Light of Day*" *Studies in Indian Place Names*. Vol-40(93). March 2020
- Dhaka, Rajesh. "Neo-rich Women in Shobha De's 'Socialite Evenings' - A Feminist Approach". *CASIRJ*. Vol6(8). 2015
- Jain, Sarita, Rashmi Bhatnagar. "Shadow Power of Matriarchy in Eastern Kire's A Terrible Matriarchy" *American Research Journals*. Vol 9(1). 2023. pp 22-27.
- Das, Veena. "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain." *Daedalus*, vol. 125, no. 1, 1996, pp. 67–91.
- Devi, Mahasweta. *Breast-Giver*. "Breast- Stories" translated by Gayatri Spivak. Calcutta: Seagull. 1997. Print.
- Reshikar, T, Dr. P Saranya. "Patriarchy structure and place of Women in Angami Society: In the Select Novel" *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences* Vol-7, Issue-6; Nov-Dec, 2022

----------

## Re-Visiting the Partition Literature from The Margin: A Study of Namasudra Life Narrative

- Subhamitra Adhikari

The historiography of the Partition of India is chiefly concerned with the Partition of Punjab and Bengal and the consequent forced migration, resettlement, and rehabilitation of Partition refugees in the new environment. In the context of Bengal, interestingly, the Partition experience chiefly encompasses the experience of the "Bhadralok". The *Bhadralok* primarily, though not exclusively, belonged to "the three traditional upper castes of Bengal", the Brahmin, Baidya and Kayastha. (Bandyopadhyay, 2004, p. 25). Any cursory exploration of Partition scholarship would reveal that upper-caste Bengalis remain the primary sites of investigation. In recent years, attempts have been made to unveil the "human history of Partition" of the *Namasudras* drawn from Bengali Namasudra writings, oral history, and the memory of the survivors of Partition and their progeny. The existing scholarship on Partition is concerned with conflicting religious identities as the parameter of Partition (Butalia 1998:297).

What needs to be explored are the plights of the linguistic, caste, gender, tribal groups with their particular trauma triggered by Partition. In Partition narratives, the voices of the Dalits Partition victims are either completely ignored or their voices remain marginal. As Urvashi Butalia has pointed out, "In its almost exclusive focus on Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims, Partition history has worked to render many others invisible. One such history is that of the scheduled castes or untouchables" (Butalia 1998).

It is in this context that contemporary Bangla Dalit writings revolve around the experience of Partition from the margin. It specifically highlights the experience of the Namasudras (it being the largest majority to have mobilized in anti-caste articulation) and contributes significantly to the construction of cartographies of Partition history.

Drawing upon Memory Studies and discourses concerning home and identity, this paper aims to analyse how caste writings like Manoranjan Byapari's autobiographical novel, *The Runaway Boy* became an important vehicle for representing the inscription and transmission of Partition memories and the connected idea of a lost home and the trauma caused thereby. It will look at the Dalit literary texts of Partition from Bengal by unveiling the muted voice and episodes. It attempts to identify different registers of public and personal memories of Partition and its afterlife in the literary imagination of the displaced lower caste refugees/ migrants to bring forth a better understanding of the perpetual trauma of dislocation, loss, and anxiety in the spheres of everydayness in the intersectional experience of class, caste and gender.

The Partition experience has multiple layers of meaning and memories for the people of the subcontinent and represents possibly the most contested discursive terrain of South Asian historiography. It indeed triggered the greatest exodus of people in human history. The entire episode of Partition compelled people to choose one nation which resulted in lost homes and altered lives forever.

As a conceptual framework for analysing historical events, Memory Studies as a discipline offers useful insights and valuable interpretations. The act of remembering is compulsorily associated with forgetting because one results in the occurrence of the other. This phenomenon of simultaneity is indicative of various registers of remembering collective and individual. Paul Ricoeur observes "A measured use of memorization also implies a measured use of forgetting" (Ricoeur, 2006, p. 68) and proceeds to further explicate issues concerning the relationship shared between remembering, forgetting and memory. Ricoeur, in his analysis of this complex and layered relationship, contends that it is the initiative to recall or remember that provides crucial scope to reframe forgetting. (Ricoeur,2006) The idea of ethics and aesthetics of memory and its working also assumes significance in our understanding of this connectedness between remembering and forgetting. This subject of memory and its concurrent dimensions has attained crucial potency in the context of

renewed interest invested in addressing and understanding the Partition. Shelley Feldman while discussing the subject of displacement and its cascading effects in the context of Partition comments pertinently:

For those who chose to move from their place of residence after that date, they were no longer merely changing residence, as in shifting from one city to another for employment or education, but instead were risking immigrant or refugee status in a place that had been, only the day before, part of a shared national space, their home. (Feldman, 2004: p. 113)

The process of displacement entailed the devastation of lived space, cultural memories and social ties. It also signified violence of loss and the unsettling emergence of an immensely difficult life for the displaced.

In exploring this aftermath of Partition, many voices have been recovered, yet many still remain silent. As Urvasi Butalia has pointed out, ‘In its almost exclusive focus on Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims, partition history has worked to render many others invisible.

One such history is that of the scheduled castes, or untouchables’ (Butalia, 2000: 235). Butalia (2000), Kaur (2007) and Rawat (2001, 2003) have sought to make the Dalits visible in the history of Partition in north India. But for eastern India, this relative discursive invisibility of the Dalits still persists. Studies on refugees mentioned above have looked at the experiences of the ‘Hindu’ refugees, problems and politics of their resettlement, the impact of refugee influx on gender and family relations, on urban life and electoral politics. But there is no study yet on the impact of this mass displacement on caste relations in Bengal. While some of these studies (particularly Chatterjee 1992 and Chatterji 2007) mention the migration, predicament, and struggles of Dalit peasant refugees, they do not fully relate these issues to the questions of their caste disability or identity politics.

In Gyan Pandey’s words, the “’ truth” of the partition’ lay in the violence it produced; he has therefore endeavoured to unravel how this violence was

‘conceptualized and remembered by those who lived through partition - as victims, aggressors or onlookers’ (Pandey, 2001). A series of studies have followed since then, focusing mainly on the refugees in Punjab (e.g., Singh 2000, Butalia 2000, Kaul 2001, Pandey 2001, Kaur 2007, Zamindar 2007) and Bengal (e.g., Chatterjee 1992, Samaddar 1997,2003, Chakrabarti 1999, Bagchi and Dasgupta 2003, Chatterji 2007, Roy 2007), exploring their experiences, their struggle for citizenship, the politics about their rehabilitation, and the impact of the memories of Partition violence on communal relations in the subcontinent.

We have been trained to remember the Partition in a certain way but that memory probably fails to capture the complex nuanced experience of the partition. Uncovering stories from the peripheries of caste and geography helps us understand the plurality of the Partition and the subcontinent.

In the context of Bengal, interestingly, the Partition experience of Bengal chiefly encompasses the experience of the “Bhadralok”. Joya Chatterji’s landmark study *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* was one of the first efforts to address the question of caste in relation to Partition and its causes. Although the burden of her analysis lay in revealing Bengali Hindus’ unequivocal investment in seeing their province partitioned, (thereby dispelling the spurious notion that Partition was the sole and direct consequence of ‘the Muslim breakaway’), she also provided substantial evidence, as part of her larger project, of how Bengali Hindu caste-elites grew increasingly concerned to reach out and accommodate the desires of their alleged social inferiors.

Manoranjan Byapari’s novel *The Runaway Boy* is an important vehicle for representing the inscription and transmission of Partition memories and the connected idea of a lost home and thereby the trauma caused.

Byapari has an absolutely different flavour from his contemporaries like that of contemporary Bengali Dalit writers like Manoranjan Byapari, Anil Gharai, Mahitosh Biswas, Kalyani Thakur Chanral, Jatin Bala, Sunil Das, Manohar



Mouli Biswas. Byapari's struggle has been from the intersection of Caste , class and gender.

His work could be considered as a representation of rage gathering impetus from an interplay between caste and class. Dalit autobiographical literature is basically a poetics of pain based on the politics of socio-cultural exclusion. In his personal narrative Byapari wages a war against the impotent political system which does not voice for the emancipation of the powerless, poor and illiterate Dalit. I would also show how Byapari's quest for identity—both of a human being and a writer—has been expressed in his autobiography and how his exemplary odyssey opens up a new avenue in the world of Bangla Dalit literature.

Byapari's works are an odyssey of a man, who though poor yet wise, wretched yet brave, caste-ridden soul yet with strength of character, journeys alone yet this individual character is a type. Byapari tends to articulate the ultimate agonizing pain of being born as a man from the lower caste as Namasudra or Chandal and the caste tag and poverty that becomes the prime movers in deciding his ill-omened and inauspicious fate at every step of life. "I have lived my life as the ill-fated Dalit son of an ill-fated Dalit father, condemned to a life of bitterness" (Byapari 4).

Manoranjan Byapari's novel is a relentless record of ordeals, with no hope in sight. Complex insights are combined with personal battles in 'The Runaway Boy'. Manoranjan Byapari asks the simplest but toughest questions through his boy protagonist in the first part of this scathing, semi-autobiographical trilogy. As he said in an interview, "I write because I can't kill." His rage is directed at Brahmins, landowners, police, the state, and also at us — the genteel, privileged reader for whom deprivation is an idea. Byapari can make us feel ashamed.

The Runaway Boy starts with the character of Garib Das, a peasant in rural East Bengal from the lower-caste Namasudra community. Only six years have passed since the independence of India and the creation of Pakistan, but for

Garib's community, this momentous historical event becomes synonymous with the horror of Partition.

The author, Manoranjan Byapari, poignantly novelises this two-sidedness. When freedom from colonial rule coincides with blood-curdling post-Partition violence in several parts of the subcontinent, the narrative seems to ask the question: independence from what? And for whom?

As the narrative progresses (or rather, regresses), Byapari weaves in complex insights about hunger, refugees, the state, communists, caste apartheid, and communalism. Profound insights that are, expectedly, bleak. And yet, oppression is not the identity of the protagonists of the novel, or the community to which they belong.

Garib's narrative reconstructs a spiral of violence that offers no escape. This cycle of debilitating oppression that stifles Garib continues to trap his son, Jibon. Jibon – life, in Bengali. And in the context of his life, we find a poignant comment on the irony of a name, of language.

As an infant, Jibon is afflicted by severe dysentery that drives him close to death, and it is quite a miracle that he pulls through. Byapari notes: "After surviving that night, Jibon lived. But the way he lived throughout his life – could that really be called living?" He hinges on this question as he takes us through Jibon's search for a livelihood, for dignity, after Jibon abruptly leaves his family in the refugee camp.

And this suddenness remains no stranger to Jibon. He is forced to pick up menial work, gets mistreated and cheated by his employers, and is either driven out violently or leaves himself, to move to another destination holding the mystical promise of "money flying in the air." Jibon's journey becomes an endless spiral of dashed dreams and painful resilience.

One might wonder if such a narrative loop gets repetitive. And it indeed does – but that is the point. Every time Jibon escapes violence and humiliation in

search of a new destination, the reader – along with Jibon – may pause and think: surely it ought to get better this time? Surely someone will be kind enough to not violate him, to pay him fairly? Surely somewhere he'll realise his hope for buying medicines for his father and a new sari for his mother?

But, as in his father's life, it simply doesn't get better. Any cautious optimism is arrested, and Byapari offers us only the devastating pathos of hunger and humiliation. Untouchability, communal violence, sexual assault, and abject poverty, the world makes Jibon go through every imaginable experience of violence. This, then, is Byapari's world – our world.

When Byapari narrates Garib's story, he observes – observes Garib's circumstances, society at large, and even Garib's psyche itself. The author's voice is once removed from the psyche of the protagonist. However, the register of the novel shifts when it occupies Jibon's perspective. Even as he continues to write in the third person, Byapari seems to inhabit the mind of the character. The mood of the novel becomes more contemplative and personal, delving into Jibon's psyche and tracing his emotional trajectory.

A large portion of the novel provides historical and social context to the protagonist's story. At times, then, it runs the risk of reading like a sociological record. However, for the most part, this is precisely what *The Runaway Boy* does not become. Historical information, developments in the political landscape, and cultural narratives of the Namasudras become enmeshed with the narrative, either through an overheard conversation, a dialogue, a seer's storytelling, or the author's voice itself – different literary tropes and styles, that is.

Further, the text weaves its socio-political meditations into the narrative, showing us their bearing upon the protagonist's story. Put another way, the political isn't simply a backdrop for the personal, story of Garib and Jibon. Instead, through the use of literary techniques, Byapari renders the political and the personal as two different registers, skilfully shifting between them.

The author engages deeply with personal memories, articulating and evoking the haptic, sonic, and visual dimensions of his experiences amid a decline in collective anchoring. He seeks to construct a unified sense of locality, one that honours a shared past and facilitates a more profound understanding of his identity. As Raymond Williams (1985) observes, “landscape takes on a different quality if you are one of those who remember” (p. 72). In this context, the act of remembrance, as mediated through cognitive mapping, revitalizes the distant land of East Bengal, rich with its everyday splendours, while also shaping the author's sense of self.

It is important to recognize that the concepts of remembrance, time, place, and loss are phenomenological realities. This suggests that the echoes of past locations resonate powerfully with displaced individuals, highlighting how the loss of a specific place fosters a profound sense of nostalgia. A similar resonance is found in Margaret E. Farrar's essay, “Amnesia, Nostalgia and Place Memory” (2011), where she argues that “accounts of people's experiences of displacement—whether as a migrant, exile, or refugee—repeatedly emphasize the interconnections between body, mind, and place” (p. 728).

## **Conclusion**

Byapari's narrative illustrates how the investment in memory necessitates a continual and delicate process of negotiation, which may perpetually involve risks and may never achieve a definitive reconciliation. This perspective is prevalent in many narratives concerning the Partition. Indeed, this study endeavours to demonstrate how expressions of longing and mental cartography acquire new significance in the context of contemporary identity politics. The representations crafted by the East Bengali imagination underscore the complex, layered nature of memory, illuminating our understanding of home as not merely a tangible entity, but rather an abstract concept that may exist primarily within the realm of writing.

In the context of literary-cultural discourses on the Partition of Bengal (1947) one can't deny the dominance of East Bengali bhadrakalok immigrant's memory. The Bhadrakaloks were under the deep influence of nationalism since the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance. As a product of the colonial educational system, they adopted a rational, argumentative approach but surreptitiously weaving a rationale to legitimise their narrow sectoral group interests. Under the veil of logic and reason, they were struggling to establish that the bifurcation of what used to be a pluralistic space along communal lines was lawful and justified. When Pakistan became a certainty in Indian politics, the division of Bengal became almost a rightful demand in the Bhadrakalok narratives.

Even after so many decades of Partition, art is exploited to appeal to the sentimentalist standpoint of "The Refugee Experience," when so much scholarship is emerging that examines Partition in all its complexity. Manoranjan Byapari, Jatin Bala, Nakul Mallik and Shamim Ahmed in creative genres, and Udit Sen, Romola Sanyal, Srila Roy and Nilanjana Chatterjee in academic research, are only a few names related to Bengal Partition scholarship, who are further creating disjuncture through their study. Unlike the way the cultural media propagates it, "Refugee Experience" has, in recent times, become more discursive. The millionaire immigrants and the pauper and labour class evacuees in the Eastern and Southern flanks of Kolkata have completely different "experiences" to tell. Autobiography is a valuable repository of memory, both personal and collective. It encompasses familial accounts of happiness and suffering; and at the same time its narrative remains a faithful representation of a whole community. Besides, it covers up social and political timeline as well. In this respect, an autobiography is not simply a family saga; rather its narrative accounts for understanding contemporary social situations. It is such works that delineate how pain and violence get translated into the context of everyday life.

## Bibliography


- Bagchi, J., & Dasgupta, S. (2003). *The trauma and the triumph: Gender and partition in eastern India*. Stree.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. (1997). *Caste, protest and identity in colonial India: The Nama Sudras of Bengal, 1872–1947*. Curzon.
- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2004). *Caste, culture, and hegemony: Social dominance in colonial Bengal* (p. 25). Sage Publications. ISBN 978-0-761-99849-5.
- Bandyopadhyay, S., & Basu Ray Chaudhury, A. (2014). *In search of space: The scheduled caste movement in West Bengal after partition*. Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group.
- Basu Raychaudhuri, A. (2004). Nostalgia of ‘desh’: Memories of partition. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(52), 5653-5660.
- Basu, J. (2013). Reconstructing the Bengal partition: The psyche under a different violence. *Samya*.
- Butalia, U. (1998). *The other side of silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Penguin Books.
- Byapari, M. (2012). *Itibritte Chandal jiban* (p. 456). Kolkata: Priya Shilpa.
- Byapari, M., & Mukherjee, M. (2007). Is there Dalit writing in Bangla? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(41), 4116–4120.
- Chatterji, J. (2002). *Bengal divided: Hindu communalism and partition, 1932–1947*.
- Chawla, D. (2014). *Home, uprooted: Oral histories of India’s partition*. Fordham University Press.
- Choudhury, M. (2021). *The home torn apart: Pangs of displacement and memory of trauma: Partition refugees, Barak Valley of Assam*. Notion Press.
- Das, S. (2003). Partition diary. In J. Bagchi & S. R. Dasgupta (Eds.), *Trauma and the triumph: Gender and partition in eastern India*. Stree.
- Farrar, Margaret. (2011). Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64 ( 4), 723-735.
- Feldman, S. (2004). Bengali state and nation making: Partition and displacement revisited. *International Social Science Journal*, 55(175), 1-167
- Hoffman, E. (2005). *After such knowledge: Memory, history and the legacy of the Holocaust*. Vintage.
- Kaur, R. (2004). *Narratives of resettlement: Past, present and politics among the Punjabi migrants in Delhi* (Ph.D. dissertation). Roskilde University, Denmark.
- Pandey, G. (2001). *Remembering Partition: Violence, nationalism and history in India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rawat, R. (2001). Partition politics and Achhut identity: A study of the Scheduled Castes Federation and Dalit politics in UP, 1946–48. In S. Kaul

(Ed.), *The partitions of memory: The afterlife of the division of India* (pp. 111–139). Permanent Black.

- Ricoeur, Paul. 2006. *Memory History Forgetting* Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. University of Chicago Press
- Williams, Raymond. (1985). *The Country and the City*. Hogarth Press

**Bengali:**

- Kar, D. (2001). *Sonar beel*. In B. Dutta Choudhury (Ed.), *Sreebhumi* (pp. XX–XX). Choudhury Printers.
- Pal, B. B. (2001). *Elen, deklen, joy korlen*. In B. Dutta Choudhury (Ed.), *Sreebhumi* . Choudhury Printers.
- Sharma, C. K. (1999). *Surma upotakay kriskhak o sramik andoloner itihās*. Oriental Book Company.
- Swami Promeyananda. (2011). *Ram Krishna Math*. Howrah, West Bengal.

----------

## **Challenging Dominance Through Voice in Cyberspace: A Study of Children of Sex Workers in G.B Road, Delhi**

- Dr. Ashwinder Kaur

### **Introduction and Background**

The open environment in which information is processed and utilised while simultaneously interacting with persons is referred to as cyberspace. Belanger and Jordan (1999) contend that cyberspace is regarded as a virtual world because it does not exist in the physical world, but in the light and electronics of modern broadband connections. As cyberspace is far more than just information technology, it contributed to the computer boom of the 1980s and 1990s. Castells noted that the network's value is comparable to the square of the number of individuals who use it, which represents an exponential rise in return rates from a network since more and more people can activate a doubling of the number of users by two to four, not almost doubling their value, but eight times increasing, it is called the 'network effect' (Castells, 1997). He emphasised the importance of the introduction of computers and communication networks to the domain and the workplace, the transformation of working relationships and living relationships in email and e-commerce. The internet is part of our life and information technology in the industrial age is akin to electricity. New energy producing technologies have helped industries flourish and multiply. The internet is the basis on which the information age is organised which is called 'network'. It can be described as an open space where processing, manipulation and exploitation of information occur along with interaction with people. Information and people are an integral part of this cyberspace. Each person's experience is unique because they use information and knowledge in their own unique ways. People can communicate and empower themselves using the new media that has evolved in this place, which has transcended geography and time. Furthermore, social media has expanded physical mobilisation by broadening the perspective and space for social change. But women are sceptical of the classifications that exist online, perceiving this space as a window through which gender is articulated.



The present study focuses on interaction of children of sex-workers of G.B Road, Delhi with this cyberspace. According to Barry (2002), “Sex work is a practice by which a person(s) achieves sexual gratification or financial gain or advancement through the abuse of a person’s human right to dignity, equality, autonomy and physical as well as mental well-being,” (Proposed Convention Against Sexual Exploitation, as cited in Kotiswaran, 2012). Thus, the practice of exploitation reduces a woman to being only an object of sexual activity. The practice of exploitation leaves women with no other alternative than to offer themselves to men at a price decided by the latter or their boss. Usually, the asking rate is a pittance as the women are almost always left at the mercy of men who take full advantage of the situation. No wonder women are referred to as the object of desire, an eternal truth that has never been challenged by men who are more than happy to allow the female of the species to hold sway over their senses (Kotiswaran, 2012). Sex workers provide a wide variety of sexual activities as documented by Harcourt and Donovan, who divided the sex industry into two distinct categories: direct work and indirect work. Some studies have shown that sex work and childbirth are intimately connected (Harcourt & Donovan, 2005). Research in underdeveloped countries has revealed that there is a high level of pregnancy with a large number of sex workers having dependent children. And, the number is as high as 90 percent (Basu & Dutta, 2011). Studies have also shown that women begin and continue working in the flesh trade in order to make a living (Basu & Dutta, 2011). The reason is not only because they have no other alternative but also due to the fact that they cannot take up any other job because of the stigma attached to their profession. Paradoxically, prostitution will never cease to exist. A whole chapter has been written by Kautilya discussed that it will persist (Kautilya, circa 300 BCE; Vatsyayana, circa 300 BCE). It will survive in some form or the other for sure.

Thus, the practice of sex work uses women as an object of desire and exploitation with no agency. Consequently, the children of sex workers have been pushed into social complexities, their very existence is a question in this patriarchal set up as a whole. These children do not experience their lives or

social relations with dignity and therefore a sense of one's own identity is a question.

## **Review of literature**

### **Understanding Cyberspace and Cyborg**

An open space where information is processed, deceived, and exploited while also interacting with humans is called cyberspace. Knowledge and people are the most important parts of cyberspace. Wherein, knowledge, physical systems, cognitive acts, and people are the four components of cyberspace. All these components are interdependent and work hand in hand. Today, personal information, rather than social information, has become the focal point of discussions. The new platforms, new services and interesting features on varied platforms have created an array of new opportunities but at the same time new threats as well as cautioned by Haraway (2016) that this space as well is gendered and is 'without pity'.

Continually evolving new skills and services in this cyberspace has further initiated discussions and researches in this field. Communication plays an important role in every internet connection, People use and manage information in their own unique ways, therefore each person's experience with this area is unique and the new modes of communication also empowers the citizens to revolt against the government and make political reforms contributing to societal transformation (Bardici, 2012, as stated in Bascallao-Pino, 2014). Mobile phones have improved network connectivity and accessibility (Misra, 2019) for advancing social change through digital movement, social engagement, and policy-making (Wallis & Given 2016).

While it may appear neutral, it is important to remember that this 'cyberspace' is also 'sexist,' as Donna Haraway (2016) pointed out. Haraway defined the cyborg as a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machines and organisms, a creature of social reality as well as fiction, a product of the post-gender world that does not carry the meaning of gender in terms of social standards (ibid: 3). It's a matter of personal experiences, including those of women. Haraway's cyborg disrupts the traditional narratives on gender that have pushed women to

play subordinate roles. This envisions a post-gender era, wherein cyborg stands as a powerful tool of resistance and rebel against the gendered power structures. But, even Haraway was afraid of this space which isn't innocent (Haraway, 2016).

### **Children and Technology**

Social networking has been a widely acknowledged phenomenon since the launch of Facebook (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social networking sites are no longer primarily concerned about facilitating communication between people who have similar interests (Zuckerberg, 2012). Facebook has provided space where friends and family may congregate to exchange photographs, jokes and the latest news as well as to interact with one another. More importantly, they were successful in convincing your friends to join as well. As a result of their sorrow, victims seek support and consolation on social media platforms such as Facebook (Smith & Doe, 2019). If a person abandons the social network, he/she will experience a loss of connection with other people and social circles (Johnson, 2016). On the other hand, it is difficult to keep victims secure on social media because information may be acquired from the accounts of family members and close acquaintances, which makes it tough to protect them (Miller, 2020). It does not matter how persuasive you are in convincing a victim to change their privacy settings if none of their friends or family members follow suit (Davis, 2021). Users who are vulnerable to security breaches on social media platforms cannot safeguard their security settings with a single click (Thompson, 2017). On such sites, children as well as people are stigmatised by the phenomenon called 'ostracism'. In the cyberspace it is called 'cyber-ostracism' (Williams, 2001). Ostracism, which is defined as being disregarded or rejected by others, is something that we all endure on a regular basis (Williams & Zadro, 2005).

### **Sex-work and Motherhood**

Simone de Beauvoir's ground-breaking work, 'The Second Sex', is largely responsible for popularising the concept of commodification (1949). In a dualistic sense, a woman was considered as 'the other' by Beauvoir. She is sex,

total sex, no less, for him (Simone de Beauvoir, p.17, 1952). She is truly treated as 'the other.' She is 'the other,' whether inferior or superior, because the male, being the man, has all the authority. By happenstance, rather than decision, he became a man. She is a woman by accident, not by choice. Unfortunately, it is to rationalise why she is treated as a second-class citizen, despite the fact that she became a lady only by chance.

The female body is viewed as an 'object,' a 'commodity,' a 'gift,' or a 'desire object.' Patriarchs, the true consumers of her body, control her rights, autonomy, wants, independence, and sexuality, subjugating her physically, ethically, sexually, and even intellectually. Women are treated as commodities in today's sexist society. Some sex workers, who are under the thumb of exploitative madams or pimps, may not even be able to negotiate for safe sex with a client (Mary, 2008, p.553). Also, sex workers often have no choice in deciding on motherhood. Sexuality and the lives of sex workers become more complex when they intersect with the social structures of society, thus questioning the very existence and survival of their children born and brought up in that area. In fact, ideas like freedom of speech and expression seem quite sophisticated for children born in a brothel (Kotiswaran, 2012). The survival of the children of sex workers in this patriarchal system as a whole is a question mark because these women have neither agency over their bodies nor any place for their expression. As a result, these children are not only barred from leading a normal life or enjoy social relations with dignity but also have no sense of identity.

### **Literature gap**

It was observed that research on children in the area of sex work and children of sex workers with regard to their health and education was inadequate. There are researches on sex work and health and children of sex-workers and educational issues however the children's interface with technology in particular the impact of cyberspace needs attention through academic research and knowledge building.

The present research contextualises the relationship between these children and the social negotiations through social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. To understand how these platforms provide them with a platform to voice their opinions and further if this helps them create networks.

### **Methodological Framework**

This is a qualitative ethnographic study. The study aims to understand the children's social realities while negotiating with the physical world and cyberspace. The design of research is descriptive in nature. The present study used ethnography as an approach to explore and narrate the lived experiences of the children of female sex-workers in the context of their access to social media platforms. The study employs purposive and snowball sampling methods for selection of the research participants. The data is collected by using ethnography, cyber-ethnography, semi-structured interviews and observation methods. Keeping the political, social and hierarchical complexities of female sex workers in mind, opening an account on Facebook and WhatsApp by their children in vulnerable areas is another reality that has been studied and analysed.

The following objectives were studied to explore the study:

- To examine the relationship between cyberspace and its influence on gender dynamics;
- To comprehend the degree of empowerment that cyberspace provides to individuals within their everyday environments;
- To explore how digital technology is utilised for self-reflection and the expression of one's voice and;
- To determine the role of cyberspace in facilitating children's interactions with society.

### **Sampling Method**

The study uses a non-probability sampling approach, specifically purposive and snowball sampling methods, to select the research participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on their expertise or experience

related to the research topic (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling, on the other hand, involves recruiting participants through referrals from initial participants or key informants (Babbie, 2013). In this study, 47 children of female sex workers were selected as research participants, along with other stakeholders such as mothers, fathers, brothel owners, police, directors, and volunteers of civil society organisations, who served as key informants.

### **Sample**

G.B. Road is known for paid sex in Delhi. For the present study, the age group ranges from 5 years to 16 years. The number of girls and boys are approximately equal and very few go to a regular school for formal education. All those interested in learning new skills and acquiring degrees, visit civil society organisations to enhance their skills. Apart from their interest in dancing, singing, theatre and so on, the children also acquire academic knowledge through NIOS (National Indian Open Schooling). One building houses more than 20 brothels and around 4-5 children live in each brothel.

This study includes 47 children of sex-workers and five other stakeholders, including mothers, volunteers of civil society organisations, Police officials, and Directors of civil society organisations are taken as key informants, their accounts have been treated as data in this ethnographic research. The participants were between 5 and 16 years old. These children live in a tiny room or a corner on rent with their mothers. Participants described their experience as children of sex workers or sex workers; they discussed their relationship and the challenges faced by them daily both at school and in the area. They also mentioned the support and programmes they needed to achieve success.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that involves identifying, coding, and categorising patterns and themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was guided by the research question: "How do children of sex workers in G.B. Road, Delhi, experience and negotiate their identities in cyberspace?" The data were coded and

categorised using a coding framework developed from the research objectives and literature review. The themes and patterns that emerged from the data were then analysed and interpreted in the context of the research objectives.

### Discussion and Findings

The present study focuses on the children of sex workers in G.B Road, Delhi and their engagement with cyberspace. The children are acutely aware of their socio-political situations and the societal stigma attached to their very existence. They often approach online platforms with hope on one hand and caution on the other. They not only use this digital space to interact, express but also to form networks and bring themselves closer and stronger. The fear of being identified or abused exists each time they use this space but at the same time they use pseudo names and hide their social positioning, one to avoid people's comments and also to avoid the abuse in their so-called houses called '*kothas*'. Their identities are associated with the *kotha* number they belong to and the so-called fathers who control them and their existence. They use the cyberspace to express themselves and voice their inner-self but at same time stay isolated. One of the children said:

*“Nahi main nahi batata kyunki mere ghar mein meri behen hai ..... aur chhota bhai hai aur mere ko achha nahi lagta hai ki main batau ki mai G.B. Road se hun..... mai jhoot bolta hun! Log ghar tak aa jayenge phir bohot hungama hoga..yahan pehle hi kum hungama hota h? Kabhi nhi bataunga....”*

The boy said if people get to know about his association with G.B Road, they might come home and create a fuss. He added that a lot of mess already exists in his life and surroundings. He admits to posting films, images and status updates on Facebook and WhatsApp, but he keeps it hidden from his G.B. Road family. He says he enjoys connecting with friends, finding out what they are up to and adds that no one should know he is from G.B. Road as it would cause problems for him and his mother. He also believes that people would stop talking to him and may even abuse him and his family. They may also believe that he is part of the sex trade. His ideas and views about revealing his

identity to strangers on social media clearly reflect his apprehension of other people's reaction. CN7 (Case Note 7) is mortally scared that people will call him names and make fun of him and his family because of what his mother does for a living. This anxiety appears to be completely contradictory to what Donna Haraway emphasised in her Cyborg manifesto, which promotes equal status for everybody in the virtual world of machines. However, it is ironically broken in the real world of these children living on G.B. Road.

Despite the complexities inherent to their social political situations, the cyberspace gives an opportunity for self-expression, advocacy and negotiation. Some children have taken initiative to use the virtual foundations to solicit support from each other and the broader communities. Digitisation has helped them not only to gain monetary aid but also educational opportunities, skill development by breaking the cycle of poverty, stigma and marginalisation. This cyberspace reflects a nuanced dynamic. Their sense of one's identity or consciousness of one's identity becomes a tool for survival and empowerment. The cyberspace serves as a platform to community advocacy, and individual agency on one hand and on the other, still posing a threat to their existence in the physical world. Though this cyberspace has some hidden threats and constraints, it has given some space to the personal voice of the children of sex workers, as one of the case notes said, "*farq nhi padta*", expressing that he does not care about the people and their comments from G.B Road and outside, now he knows how to use the digital spaces so, he feels free to express his feelings and is even brave enough to face the consequences.

### **Risks and vulnerabilities in the lives of the children of sex-workers**

Children discussed the risks and vulnerabilities that they experience while using social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp with reference to their social location on G.B. Road. Loneliness, fear, neglect, and helplessness are all issues that these children face, and such issues are highlighted in their discussions. The children seem to have a good understanding of 'image' and 'identity' while speaking about their lives. While discussing the challenges they face on G.B Road, one of the girls said,



CN4: *“Wahan pe rehna hi sabse bada challenge hai!” ..... “mujhe kisi ajnaabi se baat karna achha nahi lagta...pata nahi kon kaisa hai ....aur kahan se .... sab jhooth hi bolte hai Facebook aur WhatsApp par....”*

The girl is afraid to trust anyone either in the physical world or cyberspace and therefore does not reveal her real identity. She thinks the world is not safe and she cannot trust anyone since she is not sure about people's identities. She said, “I am already facing a lot of challenges in my real life and therefore I am afraid to even increase the problems for myself on the internet. I do not talk to strangers.” She believes that they are already not accepted by society and that revealing her true identity would lead to more disrespect and humiliation.

During focused group discussions, participants discussed that due to financial problems, many students give up studies while others do so because they lack a peace and stress-free environment at the brothel. Also, it is common for these school dropouts to face discrimination or social isolation as a result of their mothers' profession. Some are victims of exploitation at schools and brothels both, which leads to hopelessness, isolation, fear, and neglect. Thus, adding to the agony these children face when they understand the pain their mothers have been suffering from. The children covered under the study seemed to be well aware of their marginalised position in society. With this awareness, they are out in the real world to make a place for themselves where it is very difficult for them to hide their identity.

The knowledge of marginalisation is there for almost all the children of G.B Road. For example, CS4 stated, “I do not divulge my real identity be it at school or on social media.” She said, *“bohot odd lagta hai batane mein.”* While conversing, she feels awkward to discuss her address. She feels that the name of the road in her address snatches away her dignity. She added if anyone asked about her mother, she lies that her mother is a housewife. However, she cannot help since it will lead to people believing that she is part of it too. The girl further stated, *“har baat ko yahan sex se jod diya jata*

hai...” She is, in fact, sceptical of revealing her real identity to the people outside G.B Road, at school or otherwise. In her family, if she talks about anything, the people in the same *kotha*, question her character like always and relate everything to sex. Another respondent stated,

CN3 :“*Mere ko kisi ki bhi gaali sunani padti hai..... kaam karna padta hai bina wajah kaam, koi padhne bhi nahi deta.... bina wajah bohut dikhatein aati hai..... "bahut ghutan hoti hai,"*

Another respondent shared, "*galti kiso aur kiso aur hamein sunna dete hain sab..."*. In a focus group discussion, these children reveal how they face physical, verbal, and psychological abuse every day. Now, some have even accepted it as part of their everyday lives. The children lack mental as well as emotional comfort to live in society. From food to clothing and getting quality education has become a dream for many of them.

The majority of the children agreed that as long as they keep their identities hidden, they are safe and respected. But, once they reveal their identities, everything changes. People begin to abuse them, call them names, and make them a laughingstock. As a result, they have given up and prefer staying isolated.

### **Double subjugation of female children**

The researcher has known the girls since they first met her, and they have communicated with each other like other children. However, the girls of G.B Road are not permitted to speak to anyone without their so-called father's approval, indicative of strict hierarchies in the brothels. Some of them have opened up Facebook accounts and have WhatsApp numbers as well. In the majority, such accounts are not with their real names. These fake testimonies of brothel girls show their determination to make a name for themselves, despite the dangers they face every day. The so-called father seems to be a major risk. During group discussions, the girls discussed that if their fathers find out about their social media accounts, the girls are subjected to emotional and physical abuse. Secondly, their genuine identities may ruin their social

media experience because people will start cursing and assaulting them, which would be nothing short of mental torture. For females, the physical world and cyberspace operate differently; the gendered nature of these areas makes their lives far more difficult than those of males from the same environment. However, during the conversations, it was noticed that female children do not use social media a lot to express themselves freely. "*Achha hoga ki hum chup hi rahe...*," meaning it will be much better to stay quiet. One of the girl children, CN6, said it is impossible for her to share her true identity on social media. The silence these girls prefer voices their hidden agonies. On the contrary, when the children are together and with the people they like, they express themselves. Even the girls get their pictures clicked and they share their expressions on such platforms without revealing their real identities.

A few group pictures outside G.B Road, retrieved from social platforms such as Facebook demonstrate how at ease and confident the girl children are in the company of others they are familiar with. Furthermore, they have the confidence to post these photographs on social media, even when they are accompanied by females in these photographs. Female children otherwise do not post their pictures individually. It can be argued that, it is undeniable that social media is providing them with the confidence they require in their life.

### **Networking and consciousness-raising**

Self-reflection can be expressed as simple as sending a voice message, a photo, or a series of texts through WhatsApp (Rangan, 2011). Children reveal their identities, post videos on YouTube and create Facebook pages, among other things. It appears to be the breakdown of a major societal barrier for these children. One of the respondents in a discussion went on to say that earlier he did not go to anyone's house because he was afraid and embarrassed. He was concerned about how people would react if he made a mistake in some way. Furthermore, he acknowledged that earlier looking into the eyes of others was extremely difficult for him. A different kind of shame, regret, or some sort of embarrassed feeling existed in him at the time earlier, he claims. As a result, he was unable to establish relationships with people outside G.B. Road even if

they were his extended family members. Things, however, have changed and he has started to make contacts and create networks through cyberspace. Now, they have collaboratively created their Facebook pages and virtual foundations to gain resources and support.

In a post on Facebook, a young boy of G.B Road discusses how pandemic changed their lives. He also posted a story titled “*yeh badnaam gali hai*, so, no one cares” discussing how they are neglected since they are born and brought up on G.B Road. He writes on Facebook and sends WhatsApp messages to volunteers and others in contact from the physical world through cyberspace, requesting assistance for his community in order to better their socio-economic conditions. He uses captions along with the posts and tries to generate funds and promote awareness among people in his neighbourhood and beyond in order to garner attention and seek help for the community. The children have initiated their own foundation named as *Maan* Foundation. Though this foundation is operating online, they mobilise funds and have been able to create support groups through WhatsApp and Facebook and demonstrating leadership abilities.

The field data shows an image of collective cyborgs among the children at G.B Road. Haraway’s cyborg metaphor conceptualises that cyberspace can only be detrimental since she was terrified of potent fusions and assumed it would be destructive. On the contrary, the field data in the present study shows that cyberspace primarily social media applications such as Facebook and WhatsApp have been utilised to form ‘networks’ and it further unites the community of children of sex workers in G.B Road, Delhi. Thus, forming an image of ‘collective self’. Such collaborative identities can be seen through fund-raising pages on Facebook and the messages showing solidarity and unification for a cause apart from showcasing their great leadership qualities. Donna Haraway said powerful fusions could be dangerous but in the context of the present study, these children who have been helping each other and creating space for each other in the physical world. The same pattern gets reflected in cyberspace when they post pictures online to seek help and support of others. In the present study, the social media enables the children to present their best

selves to the world, brand content, make networks, express themselves better and develop collaboration with their community members. It can be argued that social media provides hope for an alternative space for networking in a collaborative and feminist way.

Though the children of sex workers have not been able to transgress the boundaries completely, they have started negotiating with their identities and also created networks to some extent. This idea of networking helps to overcome the challenges of their everyday life. At least the children are getting some space to express themselves though virtually. They are able to create their own communities and showcase their talent which were not easily available to them in the physical world. The idea of co-existence still remains true since the children straddle both the worlds (physical and cyberspace) simultaneously. They have also become data in cyberspace and are vulnerable in the physical world. But, the children forge to create new identities in cyberspace using mobile phones.

An 'interstice- is a gap between items or pieces particularly a tiny or narrow one (Bull & Fahlgren, 2015). In the same vein, the children of sex workers are using the space left by others to seek opportunities and express themselves on social media platforms. A majority of the pictures shared by the children are pleasant occasions and celebrations. When interviewed, on the other hand, it can be concluded that those occasions are rare and that they wait for them to take a picture and then broadcast it on social media to get people's reactions. The children reported that they initially used social media platforms to unwind and pass time, but over time, they realised that they could use them to develop networks, collaborate and support themselves socially as well as economically. Some of the photographs are shared on Facebook and WhatsApp with their mothers, but none of them include the background of G.B. Road or their actual location. The profession of the mother is not revealed in any of the posts, but the children have begun to post with their mothers and sisters, expressing their affection. All these updates, incidentally, have been posted primarily by the male children.

The pictures these children post are with their stories, captions and quotes appreciating themselves and their mates from G.B and also connecting with the broader communities outside their place of belongingness. These posts are indeed a testimony to their self-reflection and voice. The children have even started to make groups on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to form networks and strengthen themselves. And, some children have launched their own YouTube channel, Facebook pages and social service platform (*Maan* Foundation) online to demonstrate their abilities to the rest of the world as well as to connect with other marginalised children like themselves to join them in establishing a ‘collective cyborg’.

Thus, even if social media provides some space or opportunity for the children of sex workers, this space does not exist in isolation. Therefore, it is critical to analyse the risks and vulnerabilities of technology along with the advantages they possess. A person’s social reality is always attached, even if the person is offered an opportunity to negotiate and connect with the new technology.

### **Conclusion**

The act of publicly speaking, or expressing a voice, is frequently cited in feminist and gender and development literature as one of the essential elements proving empowerment. Most feminists view one's agency and an attempt to speak up as evidence of their empowerment (Gilligan, 1982). The current study examines the relationship between the children of sex workers of G.B Road, Delhi and their expression in cyberspace, their ‘personal voice’ is certainly capable of creating an opportunity that is often curtailed in the physical world wherein, their belongingness to the place of birth or their mother’s workplace defines their socio-economic positioning. The digital space, while not entirely free from flaws as discussed by Haraway (1991) also has its limitations, as the current study reveals that this space is gendered where male children are more active than female children, and female children face more restrictions and caution in expressing themselves online. The children have started to share their identities as part of a collaborative and even girls express themselves when in a collaboration such as group pictures and

sometimes when out of the road, they get their pictures clicked and upload with pseudo names and fake accounts.

This space presents an 'interstice—a gap' (Bull & Fahlgren, 2015) that has been utilised by the children of sex workers from G.B Road, Delhi. This utilisation of leftover digital spaces gives hope for children in precarious situations or people in vulnerable situations to contest the dominance imposed by the existing socio-political hierarchies, thereby challenging traditional dichotomies of good versus bad.

The findings suggest that cyberspace plays a significant role in the lives of children of sex workers, particularly in terms of their gender dynamics. The study reveals that this space is also gendered as male children express themselves more freely as compared to the female children and female children face more restrictions and they have to be more cautious while using this space as well. However, despite these challenges, cyberspace provides opportunities for self-expression, voice and empowerment. The children use digital technology to express themselves, share their stories, connect with others and further form networks and collaborations. Some have even started to reveal their real identities and created networks online such as Facebook Pages and YouTube channels, to overcome the everyday challenges they have been facing and further collaborative actions to help themselves get empowered. The children share these links on WhatsApp with the volunteers and people outside G.B Road to gain financial help and social support. In terms of self-expression and voice, the children have started to share pictures and videos in cyberspace. The female children do not reveal their identities freely when they are alone, but even the girls actively participate in collective efforts and express themselves in group photographs. Finally, in relation to determine the role of cyberspace in facilitating children's interactions with society at large. The findings indicate that Facebook pages being created and run by the children are allowing them to connect with others, form networks, and access resources and support.

Overall, the study discusses that cyberspace has the potential to provide a platform for people of marginalised backgrounds to express themselves, form networks, and access resources and support, which can help them overcome the challenges of their everyday lives. However, it is equally important to address the limitations and challenges that child, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds face even in cyberspace. Further research is needed to explore such issues with a gender lens and develop strategies to support the process of self-expression and empowerment in cyberspace.

### **Future Recommendations**

1. Use of new technology may be encouraged in skill-based learning experiences and other educational practices which can help the children of sex-workers and children from vulnerable backgrounds to stay connected with the teachers and volunteers even if they cannot meet them physically.
2. To be able to strengthen the institutionalisation of response systems, various stakeholders such as police stations, civil society organisations, hospitals and society need to be sensitised and disseminate the best practices of improving the lives of vulnerable children through the digitisation. It is also critical to enhance competencies through participation in discussions, dialogue and imparting skills and providing practical training.
3. There has not been sufficient research focusing on the conditions of these children and their vulnerabilities across different geographical boundaries. As a result, the realities of their lives are hidden and completely neglected. Research needs to focus on the sex workers' children which will enable the government and international agencies to formulate policies in order to help the kids escape the red-light district and thus, break the cycle of sex trade for future generations.



## References

- Adhikari, H. (2014). Development of boyhood in female sex workers' family—A representation of their vicious cycle. *World*, 1(1)
- Adhikari, H. (2012). Attachment of stigma in sex workers' milieu (family & community): A hindrance of psychosocial development of their children. *Atilim Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 1(2), 95-110
- Bardici, V. (2012). *As stated in* Bascallao-Pino, A. M. (2014). New modes of communication: Web 2.0 and the reform of state broadcasting services. *Global Media Journal*, 12(22)
- Basu, A., & Dutta, M. J. (2011). 'We are mothers first': Localocentric articulation of sex worker identity as a key in HIV/AIDS communication. *Women & Health*, 51(2), 106-123
- Belingheri, P., Chiarello, F., Fronzetti Colladon, A., & Rovelli, P. (2021). Twenty years of gender equality research: A scoping review based on a new semantic indicator. *PLoS ONE*, 16(9): e0256474. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0256474
- Bell, D. (2006). *An introduction to cybercultures*. Routledge
- Bierema, L. L. (2005). Women's silence in a man's world. *Women in Management Review*, 20(7), 477-490
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 210-230
- Bull, Jacob, & Fahlgren, Margaretha (2015). *Ill-disciplined Gender*. U.S: Springer (P.1-30)
- Castells, M. (1997). An introduction to the information age. *City*, 2(7), 6-16
- Chakravarti, U. (2016). *Thinking gender doing gender*. Orent Blackswan; Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla
- Chase, E., & Statham, J. (2005). Commercial and sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK—A review. *Child Abuse Review: Journal of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 14(1), 4-25
- Clynes, M. E., & Kline, N. S. (1960). Cyborgs and space. *Astronautics*, 14(9), 26-27
- Confortini, C. C. (2006). Galtung, violence, and gender. The case for a peace studies/feminism alliance. *Peace and Change*, 31(3), 333-367
- Coontz, S. (2016). *Women's work, men's property: The origins of gender and class*. Verso Books
- Costanza, K. "Children of the Brothel", *World vision*
- Davis, S. (2021). Privacy Settings and Social Media: The Unseen Dangers. *Tech Trends*, 65(4), 27-31
- De Beauvoir, S. (1952). *The second sex*, trans. HM Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1974), 38

- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). Woman as other. *Social Theory*, 337-339
- Dictionary, A. H. (2000). *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*. [Answers.com](https://www.answers.com)
- Doezema, J. (2010). *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking*. Zed Books
- Erin Holliday-Karre. (2017). The Feminist Seduction: Cyborg Writing and Womanspeak. *Symplokē*, vol. 25, no. 1–2, p. 295, <https://doi.org/10.5250/SYMPLOKE.25.1-2.0295>
- Freire, P. (1970). Cultural action and conscientization. *Harvard educational review*, 40(3), 452-477
- Gall, G. (2012). *An agency of their own: Sex worker union organizing*. John Hunt Publishing
- Ghosh, B. (2008). *Prostitution and beyond: An analysis of sex work in India*
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MD
- Giri Mohini (2001). "Trafficking in Women and Children". *Vikasini: the Journal of Women's Empowerment*, 16 (1), 3-7
- Giri Mohini. (2001). *Girls' Rights: Society Responsibility Taking Action Against Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking*. New Delhi: National Commission for Women
- Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Manifestly Haraway* (Vol. 37). U of Minnesota Press
- Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press
- Haraway, D. (2006). A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late 20th century. In *The international handbook of virtual learning environments* (pp. 117-158). Springer, Dordrecht
- Haraway, D. J. (1997). The virtual speculum in the new world order. *Feminist Review*, 55(1), 22-72
- Haraway, Donna. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books: London
- Haraway, D. (1989). Cyborg manifesto. In *Simians, cyborgs, and women*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Haraway, D. (1985). A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science and Technology
- Harcourt, C., & Donovan, B. (2005). The many faces of sex work. *Sexually transmitted infections*, 81(3), 201-206
- Jeffreys, S. (1997). *The Idea of Prostitution*. Spinifex Press
- Johnson, L. (2018). The Impact of Social Media on Social Connections. *The Information Society*, 34(3), 156-165
- Kautilya. (circa 300 BCE). *Arthashastra*, [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1769362.The\\_Arthashastra](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1769362.The_Arthashastra)

- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1. *Gender & development*, 13(1), 13-24
- Kabeer, N. (1999). The conditions and consequences of choice: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment (Vol. 108, pp. 1-58). Geneva: UNRISD
- Kannabiran, Kalpana, & Swaminathan, Padmini. (2017). Re-Presenting Feminist Methodologies. Taylor & Francis. India: Routledge (P.131-157)
- Kotiswaran, Prabha (2012). *Dangerous Sex, Invisible Labor*. India: Princeton University Press. (P.1-67)
- Mary, L. (2008). Negotiating for safe sex among sex workers: The complexity of empowerment and agency of women who do sex work. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 31(6), 553-560
- Miller, R. (2020). Security Risks in Social Media Platforms. *Cybersecurity Journal*, 12(2), 89-102
- Misra, G., & Chandiramani, R. (Eds.). (2005). *Sexuality, gender and rights: Exploring theory and practice in South and Southeast Asia*. Sage
- Misra, G., Mahal, A., & Shah, R. (2000). Protecting the rights of sex workers: the Indian experience. *Health & Hum. Rts.*, 5, 88
- Misra, S. (2019). New media & social networks: A contemporary public sphere for social change. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 9(6), 324-334
- Mitra, A., & Schwartz, R. L. (2001). From cyber space to cybernetic space: Rethinking the relationship between real and virtual spaces. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 7(1), JCMC713
- Moloi, K. C., & Dimema, M. (2013). Transgressing the Boundaries: Re-Imagining Gender in Education. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(13), 119
- Nagle, J. (2013). *Whores and other feminists*. Routledge
- Parpart, J. L. (2013). Choosing silence: Rethinking voice, agency and women's empowerment. In *Secrecy and silence in the research process* (pp. 15-29). Routledge
- Pandey, S. Review Essay: Trafficking of Children for Sex Work in India: Prevalence, History, and Vulnerability Analysis
- Patkar, P. (2013). Civil society initiative of a decade against human trafficking: An insider's attempt at looking back. *Human Trafficking: The Stakeholders' Perspective*, 25
- Rakow, L. F. (2009). Gendering of a Communication Technology 1988. *The Design Culture Reader*, 113
- Rakow, L. F. (1988). Gendered technology, gendered practice. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 5(1), 57-70
- Senchuk, D. M. (1990). Listening to a different voice: a feminist critique of Gilligan. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 10, 233-249

- Shah, S. P. (2014). *Street corner secrets*. Duke University Press
- Singh, A. K., & Pandey, S. P. (2013). Women Trafficking in India: A Case Study of Women Sex Workers of Uttar Pradesh. *Human Trafficking: The Stakeholders' Perspective*
- Smith, J., & Doe, A. (2019). The Role of Social Media in Emotional Support: A Case Study. *Journal of Cyberpsychology*, 22(4), 45-60
- Solnit, R. (2017). *The Mother of All Questions: Further Feminisms*. Granta Books
- Thompson, L. (2017). *Protecting Vulnerable Users on Social Media*. *Journal of Internet Law*, 20(10), 3-9
- Vatsyayana. (circa 300 BCE). *Kamasutra*
- Wallis, C., & Given, L. M. (2016). Social media in disaster response: How experience architects can build for participation. *Academic Press*
- Williams, K. D. (2001). Ostracism: The Power of Silence. *Emotions and Social Behavior*. New York: Guilford Press
- Williams, K. D., & Zadro, L. (2005). Ostracism: The indiscriminate early detection system. In K. D. Williams, J. P. Forgas, & W. von Hippel (Eds.), *The social outcast: Ostracism, social exclusion, rejection, and bullying* (pp. 19-34). New York, NY, US: Psychology Press
- Zuckerberg, M. (2012). Building a Network for Sharing. *Harvard Business Review*, 90(11), 35-37



## **Breaking Taboos: Menstruation in Contemporary Hindi Films**

- Dr. Padmini Jain

### **Introduction**

Menstruation is a biological process experienced by women, who form a significant portion of the global population. However, in Indian society, it has long been shrouded in silence, stigma, and shame. These societal taboos have led to a widespread lack of knowledge about menstruation, menstrual hygiene, and health. Recently, there has been a shift towards greater openness in media representations of menstruation, moving from omission to conversation.

Hindi cinema, a powerful medium for reflecting and challenging societal norms and traditional beliefs, plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse. This study examines the portrayal of menstruation in Hindi cinema, focusing on cinematic themes and narratives, the language used, the depiction of menstruating women, and societal norms towards menstruation. The analysis aims to determine whether these films reinforce, or challenge related societal beliefs and practices within specific contexts.

Using textual analysis, let us dissect two films, *Phullu* (Abhishek Saxena, 2017) and *Pad Man* (R. Balki, 2018), to uncover the underlying themes, patterns, and messages related to menstruation.

### **Literature Review:**

The portrayal of menstruation in Hindi cinema is a compelling subject that warrants a critical examination, given its potential impact on societal perspectives. Over the years, the representation of women and their issues in Hindi cinema has been a topic of insightful debate among scholars.

### **Gender Portrayal in films:**

**Gender and Hindi Cinema:** Extensive research has been conducted on the representation of men, women, and the LGBTQ+ community in media, revealing persistent gender biases across cultures and societies. Studies

focusing on Indian media highlight similar patterns of gendered representations. Scholars like Hansika Kapoor, Prachi H. Bhuptani and Amuda Agneswaran (2017) have pointed out the misrepresentation of women in Indian media, often through the reinforcement of stereotypes.

In the context of Hindi cinema, researchers have identified recurring patterns of male-dominated narratives. According to Tere (2012), Hindi cinema narratives are predominantly male-centric, with significant weight given to the male audience's perspective. Female characters are often portrayed through a lens that caters to male viewers, marginalizing women's experiences and identities.

**Menstruation, Culture, and Media:** The portrayal of menstruation in media, especially within cultural contexts like India, has been minimal and often surrounded by stigma and taboo. Historically, menstruation has been a subject avoided in mainstream media, leading to a lack of awareness and perpetuation of myths and misconceptions. Media representations, including those in Hindi cinema, have started to shift towards more openness and dialogue around menstruation, but challenges remain.

Scholars have noted that when menstruation is addressed in media, it is often done in ways that continue to reinforce traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms. For instance, the media portrayal tends to frame menstruation within the confines of women's reproductive roles, without challenging the broader socio-cultural taboos and stigmas.

**Menstruation in Hindi Cinema:** In recent years, Hindi cinema has begun to engage with the topic of menstruation more directly. Films like *Phullu* (2017) and *Pad Man* (2018) have been instrumental in bringing the conversation about menstruation to the forefront. These films not only depict the challenges faced by women due to menstrual stigma but also highlight the efforts of individuals working to change these perceptions.

However, the representation of menstruation in these films is not without its critiques. Scholars argue that while these films aim to be progressive, they often fall back on traditional narratives that place men as the saviours of

women, thereby reinforcing existing gender dynamics rather than challenging them. For example, in *Pad Man*, the male protagonist is depicted as the sole hero who addresses the issue of menstrual hygiene, which sidelines the agency of female characters and their experiences.

Dominantly, the cinematic gaze in Hindi films has traditionally been male, which influences how women's issues, including menstruation, are portrayed. Laura Mulvey's critique of the male gaze highlights how cinema often objectifies women, presenting them as passive subjects for male pleasure. This perspective is evident in many Hindi films, where menstruating women are either invisible or depicted in ways that reinforce their marginalization.

The review of existing literature brings to light the complex relationship between gender representation and Hindi cinema. It highlights that while there has been some progress in the portrayal of menstruation, much of it remains entrenched in patriarchal narratives. There is a need for a more nuanced and inclusive cinematic approach that not only breaks stereotypes but also challenges societal norms, presenting menstruation as a natural and essential aspect of women's lives. This refined approach would contribute significantly to altering societal perceptions and promoting a more informed and open dialogue about menstruation.

**Aim:** Let us try to critically analyse the cinematic portrayal of menstruation in Hindi films, focusing on *Pad Man* and *Phullu*. These films explicitly address menstruation, a natural and biological process that has long been surrounded by taboos in India. Recent years have seen more open discussions about menstruation, making this a timely area of exploration.

**Textual Analysis:** To understand the narrative in these films, to gain a better insight, let us employ a qualitative approach, which allows for a flexible and in-depth analysis of the portrayals in these films. The textual analysis method is used to decipher the meanings embedded within the two films' texts. This method helped examine the cinematic themes, film dialogues, visual imagery, narrative structures, characters, to uncover the underlying ideas in *Pad Man* and *Phullu*. These films are critiqued to understand how they portray

menstruation and the associated societal norms, gender dynamics, and cultural ideas.

The analysis focuses on the following aspects:

**Narrative Perspective:** Examining whose perspective shapes the narrative and how it influences the portrayal of menstruation.

**Character Depiction:** Analysing the depiction of female characters and whether the films succeed in being inclusive of diverse women's identities and experiences.

**Societal Norms and Treatment:** Investigating how the films depict the treatment of menstruating women and the societal norms within their contexts.

**Language and Discourse:** Analysing the language and discourses surrounding menstruation in the films.

By dissecting these elements, we shall be able to uncover the embedded messages and underlying implications of the portrayals in these films. This approach will help us understand how these cinematic representations reflect and challenge existing norms and contribute to societal discourses on menstruation.

The representation of menstruation in Hindi cinema has historically been shrouded in taboo and silence. However, recent films like *Phullu* and *Pad Man* have started to break this silence, bringing attention to menstrual health and hygiene.

### **"Phullu"**

*Phullu* tells the story of a local trader from a village who discovers menstruation and its associated challenges late in life. His journey to the city exposes him to the stark realities faced by women in his village, including the lack of sanitary facilities and the pervasive stigma around menstruation. This film uses a narrative that underscores the ignorance and subsequent



enlightenment of the male protagonist to bring attention to menstrual hygiene issues.

One of the significant themes in *Phullu* is the use of euphemisms to discuss menstruation. Terms like "*janani rog*" (woman's disease) are employed, highlighting the shame and taboo that surround the topic. This linguistic choice mirrors the societal discomfort with openly discussing menstruation, reflecting deep-seated cultural stigmas.

The film also portrays the economic barriers and social discrimination women face regarding menstrual hygiene. By setting the story in a rural context, *Phullu* emphasizes the intersection of poverty, lack of education, and traditional beliefs that exacerbate menstrual health challenges. However, this focus on rural settings can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, suggesting that such issues are confined to non-urban areas, which is not actually true.

### **"Pad Man"**

*Pad Man* takes a more direct approach to the subject of menstruation, inspired by the real-life story of Arunachalam Muruganatham, who invented a low-cost sanitary pad-making machine. The film follows the protagonist's journey as he battles societal norms to create affordable sanitary pads for women in his community.

*Pad Man* challenges the taboos around menstruation more explicitly than *Phullu*. The protagonist's determination to address menstrual hygiene openly contrasts with societal reluctance. The film employs the pad as a symbol of women's empowerment, advocating for better menstrual health education and breaking the silence around the topic.

Despite its progressive stance, *Pad Man* also falls into certain narrative traps. The portrayal often centres on the male protagonist's heroism, potentially overshadowing the women's experiences and agency. This perspective can inadvertently reinforce the notion that women's health issues need to be addressed through male intervention rather than female empowerment.

**Comparisons** The analysis of *Phullu* and *Pad Man* reveals a nuanced portrayal of menstruation, highlighting both progressive elements and persistent stereotypes. *Phullu* presents the issue of menstrual hygiene from a grassroots perspective, focusing on socio-economic barriers and cultural stigmas in rural India. The protagonist's journey from ignorance to advocacy underscores the lack of awareness and accessibility of menstrual products in rural areas. In contrast, *Pad Man* approaches the subject from an entrepreneurial angle, showcasing innovation in menstrual hygiene products and challenging societal taboos through the protagonist's efforts.

These films employ different narrative strategies to address menstruation. *Phullu* uses a more intimate, localized narrative, while *Pad Man* adopts a broader, more commercially appealing approach. Despite these differences, both films emphasize the importance of menstrual hygiene and seek to normalize the conversation around menstruation. However, the male-centric perspectives in both films inadvertently reinforce patriarchal norms by positioning men as the primary agents of change, thus side-lining women's voices and experiences.

**Implications for Future Representation:** Both *Phullu* and *Pad Man* lead the path towards open discussions of menstruation in Hindi cinema. However, there is a need for more inclusive and diverse portrayals. Future films should aim to present a broader spectrum of experiences, including urban perspectives, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of menstrual health issues. This inclusivity can help dismantle the stereotypes and broaden the discourse to include all women's experiences.

While these films initiate important conversations, they also highlight the necessity of further research and reflection within the Hindi film industry. There is potential for future works to explore menstruation in various contexts and narratives, moving beyond the initial steps taken by *Phullu* and *Pad Man*.

**To summarise,** *Phullu* and *Pad Man* represent a significant step forward in the portrayal of menstruation in Hindi cinema. While they have initiated important conversations and challenged some stigmas, there is still a need for more

inclusive and diverse representations that center women's voices and experiences. These films highlight the potential of cinema as a tool for social change, urging both policymakers and academics to continue exploring and addressing the complex issues surrounding menstruation in India.

**A peep into the existing interest in this area:** The analysis of *Phullu* and *Pad Man* offer a profound understanding of the portrayal of menstruation in Hindi cinema. These films represent a significant shift from the traditional silence surrounding menstruation in Indian media, providing a platform for discussing menstrual health and hygiene.

The portrayal of menstruation in these films aligns with previous research on gender and media, which highlights the persistent marginalization of women's issues in Indian cinema. Studies by Basu and Tripathi (2022) noted the limited representation of menstruation in Indian media, with most portrayals confined to advertisements for sanitary products. The shift observed in *Phullu* and *Pad Man* is significant, as these films bring the topic into mainstream cinema, challenging the deep-rooted stigmas and encouraging public discourse.

Gupta and Prakash (2021) highlighted how Hindi cinema often perpetuates traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The findings from *Phullu* and *Pad Man* partially support this, as the films, despite their progressive themes, still operate within a framework that centres on male protagonists and marginalizes female perspectives. This suggests that while there is progress in the representation of menstruation, the portrayal still reflects broader gender dynamics in Indian society.

The portrayal of menstruation in *Phullu* and *Pad Man* can be linked to the feminist media theory, which critiques how media representations often reinforce gender inequalities. The films' focus on male protagonists as saviours who address menstrual issues reflects a patriarchal narrative, where women's autonomy and agency are secondary. This aligns with the feminist critique that mainstream media often sidelines women's experiences and voices, even when addressing women's issues.

The cultural theory of menstruation, which explores how menstrual taboos and stigmas are culturally constructed, is evident in both films. *Phullu* and *Pad Man* highlight the socio-cultural barriers and stigmas associated with menstruation, reflecting the pervasive cultural norms that view menstruation as a source of shame and secrecy. These portrayals underscore the need for a cultural shift in how menstruation is perceived and discussed in society.

**Recommendations:** Based on the analysis and the consequences of such portrayals, several recommendations can be made.

**For Policymakers:**

**Improve Access to Menstrual Products:** Policymakers should focus on increasing the availability of affordable menstrual products in rural areas, as highlighted in *Phullu*. This could involve subsidies, distribution programs, and partnerships with NGOs and private companies.

**Menstrual Health Education:** Incorporating menstrual health education into school curricula and public health campaigns can help break the stigma and promote better hygiene practices. This can be supported by media campaigns that ride upon the popularity of films like *Pad Man* to reach a wider audience.

**Academic Recommendations:**

**Research Expand on Media Representations:** Future research should explore a broader range of films and media texts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how menstruation is portrayed in Indian cinema. This can include documentaries, web series, and regional films that address the topic.

**Audience Reception Studies:** Analysing how different audiences perceive and interpret these films can provide valuable insights into the impact of media representations on societal attitudes towards menstruation. This can help in designing more effective media interventions for public health education.

**Conclusion:** The analysis of *Phullu* and *Pad Man* demonstrates the complex nature of portraying menstruation in Hindi cinema. These films have initiated a shift towards breaking the silence around menstrual health and hygiene, offering critical social commentary on traditional beliefs and practices. Yet

they also bring about the need for more diverse and inclusive representations to accurately reflect the experiences of all women. We cannot deny the role of cinema in shaping societal attitudes towards menstruation and advancing gender equality. Future research and cinematic attempts should build on these foundations, continuing to challenge stigmas and promote a more open and inclusive discourse on menstruation.

### References

- Basu, A., & Tripathi, P. (2022). Comprehending the bleeding body: Epistemological violence and (Un) taboos menstruation in selective media texts in India. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 24(6), 18.
- Dahlqvist, A. (2018). *It's only blood: shattering the Taboo of Menstruation*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Flaake, K. (2005). Girls, adolescence and the impact of bodily changes: Family dynamics and social definitions of the female body. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 12(2), 201-212.
- Johnston-Robledo, I., & Stubbs, M. L. (2013). Positioning periods: Menstruation in social context: An introduction to a special issue. *Sex Roles*, 68, 1-8.
- Kapoor, H., Bhuptani, P. H., & Agneswaran, A. (2017). The Bechdel in India: Gendered depictions in contemporary Hindi cinema. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(2), 212-226.
- Lee, J., & Sasser-Coen, J. (1996). Memories of menarche: Older women remember their first period. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 10(2), 83-101.
- Mulvey, L. (2013). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In *Feminism and film theory* (pp. 57-68). Routledge.
- Tere, N. S. (2012). Gender reflections in mainstream Hindi cinema. *Global Media Journal Indian Edition*, 3(1), 1-9.
- Yadav, G., & Gaur, I. (2023). Gaze Averted: Interrogating the Portrayal of Menstruation in Hindi Cinema. In *Gender, Cinema, Streaming Platforms: Shifting Frames in Neoliberal India* (pp. 161-179). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

### Films:

- *Pad Man*. <https://www.netflix.com/in/title/81016191>
- *Phullu*. <https://app.primevideo.com/detail?gti=amzn1.dv.gti.9cb4fed0-afa9-cac8-e88a-7b3aaba45c50>

## **STUDENT'S/LEARNER'S SECTION**

### **Gender and Economy**

- Shriya Bhatia

#### **Introduction**

*“To achieve international co-operation ... in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.”*

UN support for the rights of women began with the Organization's founding Charter. This phase is among the purposes of the UN declared in Article 1 of its Charter.<sup>1</sup>

In India, socio-economic and political experiences are profoundly shaped by factors such as class, caste, gender, religion, and ethnicity. Societal hierarchies based on constructs like caste and gender often limit individuals' economic roles and access to essential institutions and services. Within this complex socio-cultural framework, achieving gender equality is a vital goal, recognized under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations. Advancing gender equality can enhance productivity, growth, and overall development.

Despite extensive discourse on gender equality, there is a persistent focus on the binary categorization of gender—male and female—overlooking the rights of transgender individuals. This marginalization questions the feasibility of true gender equality. Genuine equality requires recognizing and uplifting all gender identities, ensuring inclusive progress and fairness.

Even with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1948, transgender individuals still face denial of fundamental rights like dignity and equality. A human rights framework tailored to transgender people is essential,

---

<sup>1</sup> “United Nations”; <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20represent%20half,human%20potential%20and%20sustainable%20development>.

emphasizing societal roles in perpetuating discrimination and aiming to change these negative perceptions and behaviours.

### **What is the third gender?**

In April 2014, India's Supreme Court acknowledged the presence of a third gender, although no official definition exists for this category. Those who identify outside the male-female binary are often referred to as Hijra or transgender individuals. Tragically, the Hijra community has endured discrimination, harassment, and persecution due to their gender identities. Furthermore, alongside the wider queer community, Hijras have been singled out by law enforcement and government authorities using Section 377, a colonial-era law criminalizing queer sexual acts. This legislation has perpetuated discrimination and mistreatment of LGBTQ+ individuals for years.<sup>1</sup> The term transgender emerged in the mid-1990s within the larger community to describe individuals whose gender identity differs from the one assigned at birth. It serves as an umbrella term for those challenging rigid, binary gender norms and conforming to culturally prevalent gender roles.

### **History of the third gender in India**

Transgender individuals have been integral to Indian society for centuries, reflected in historical references to the third gender in ancient texts like Hindu mythology, folklore, epics, and Vedic literature, showing a nuanced view of gender beyond binary norms.<sup>2</sup> Jain texts delve into the concept of 'psychological sex,' focusing on an individual's psychological traits rather than physical attributes. Historically, transgender communities held significant roles in Indian society, such as bestowing blessings in ceremonies and serving in royal courts during Islamic empires like the Mughals, valued for loyalty, intelligence, and trustworthiness.

---

<sup>1</sup> "India's Relationship with the Third Gender"; UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog; October 29, 2018; <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2018/10/29/indias-relationship-with-the-third-gender/>

<sup>2</sup> "Socio-economic status of the Transgenders in India"; Dr. Radhika Kapur; March 2018; [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323695173\\_Socio-Economic\\_Status\\_of\\_the\\_Trans-genders\\_in\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323695173_Socio-Economic_Status_of_the_Trans-genders_in_India)

However, today's transgender community faces challenges like limited education and job opportunities due to social stigma and legal barriers. They encounter obstacles in accessing services and economic opportunities, reflected in their lack of assets, stable income, and exclusion from the financial system. These barriers perpetuate their socio-economic challenges and financial exclusion.

➤ **Transgender community in India**

The 2011 Indian census marked the first data collection on transgender individuals, revealing about 490,000 third-gender people, mostly in rural areas (66%). Their literacy rate was lower at 46% compared to the general population's 74%. States like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Manipur had higher proportions, while Gujarat and Kerala had lower ratios.

Table 1: Population Census of Transgenders

S. No.	State	Transgenders	Child (0-6)	SC	ST	Literacy
1	UTTAR PRADESH	137,465	18,734	26,404	639	55.80%
2	DELHI	4,213	311	490	0	62.99%
3	INDIA	487,803	54,854	78,811	33,293	56.07%

**SOURCE: Population Census<sup>1</sup>**

In response to these findings, the Indian government has implemented various welfare schemes to support transgender growth. These initiatives include the National Pension Scheme, scholarships, skill development programs, and financial aid for parents of transgender children, aiming to enhance their social and economic inclusion and well-being.

<sup>1</sup> "Population Census"; Transgender in India; <https://www.census2011.co.in/transgender.php>



- Educational qualification of the Transgenders of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh

Table 2: Educational Qualification

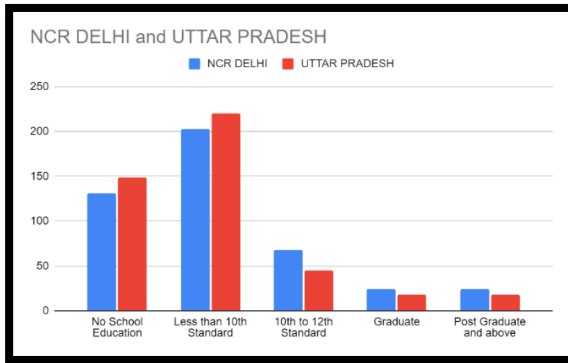
	No School Education	Less than 10 <sup>th</sup> Standard	10 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> Standard	Graduate	Post Graduate and above	Total
<b>NCR DELHI</b>	131	203	68	24	24	450
<b>Percentage</b>	29.11%	45.11%	15.12%	5.33%	5.33%	100%
<b>UTTAR PRADESH</b>	149	220	45	18	18	450
<b>Percentage</b>	33.11%	48.89%	10%	4%	4%	100%

**Source: NHRC, 2017<sup>1</sup>**

Transgender individuals in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh face significant educational disparities. NHRC's 2017 data shows that in NCR Delhi, 29.11% had no formal schooling, and 45.11% had education below 10th standard. Uttar Pradesh mirrors this, with 33.11% lacking formal education and 48.89% below 10th standard, indicating systemic educational barriers for transgender people in both urban and rural areas.

<sup>1</sup> “Study on Human Rights of Transgender as a Third Gender”; National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); Kerala Development Society, Delhi; February 2017; [https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Study\\_HR\\_transgender\\_03082018.pdf](https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Study_HR_transgender_03082018.pdf)

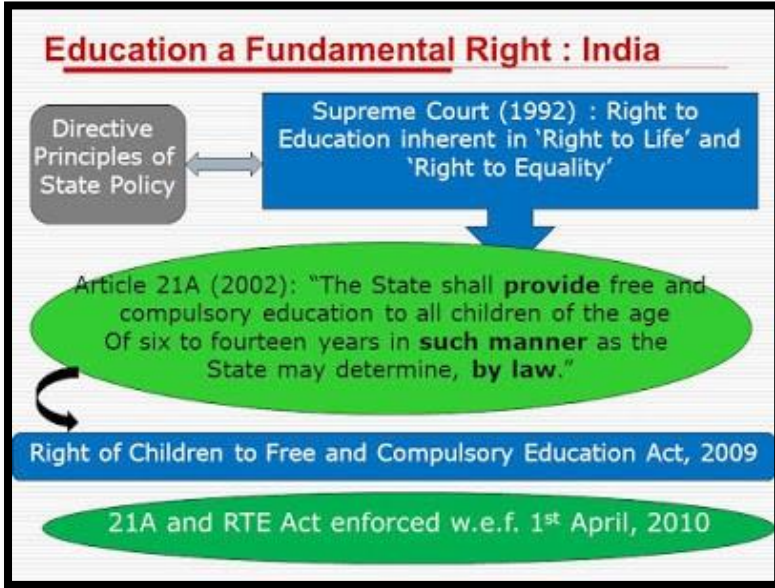
Chart 1: Graph on Educational Qualification



Source: NHRC, 2017

The Right to Education Act, in place since 2009, promises free and compulsory education for all, including transgender individuals. However, its implementation has been lacking, denying quality education and perpetuating social and economic inequalities.

Flow chart 1



Source: TNPSC Theru Pettagam, 2019<sup>1</sup>

➤ Pattern of Employment / Livelihood

Table 3: Employment / Livelihood

Employment/livelihood	Tg in Delhi (no. Of responses)	Tg in Delhi (%)	Tg in up (no. Of responses )	Tg in up (%)	Total number	Total in %
Badhai/Blessings/Singing/	99	22%	121	26.88 %	220	24.44 %

<sup>1</sup> "RTE Act 2009"; TNPSC Theru Pettagam; October 11, 2019; <https://www.tnpsctheruvupettagam.com/articles-detail/rte-act-2009>

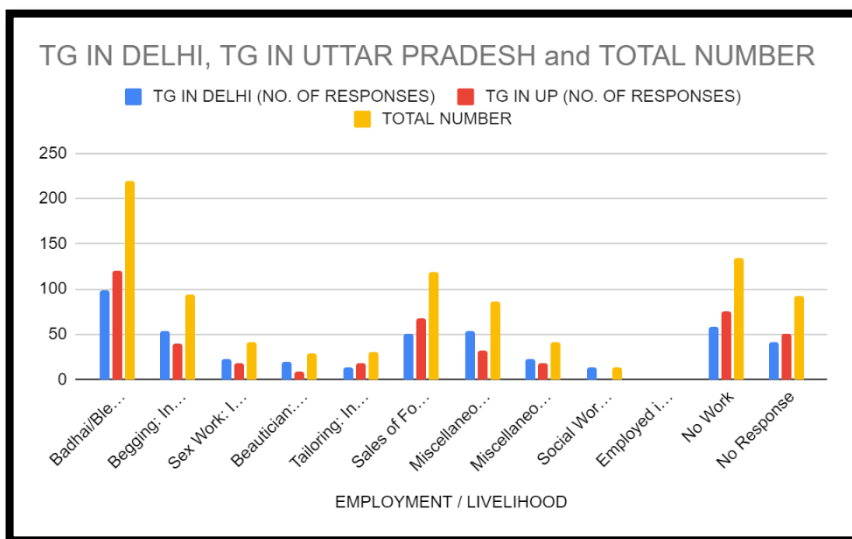
Dancing: Informal Sector						
Begging: Informal Sector	54	12%	40	8.89%	94	10.44 %
Sex Work: Informal Sector	23	5.11%	18	4%	41	4.56%
Beautician: Informal Sector	20	4.44%	9	2%	29	3.22%
Tailoring: Informal Sector	13	2.88%	18	4%	31	3.44%
Sales of Food Items/fruits/veget ables, flowers, cloths, etc. as street vendors/by visiting houses/offices: Informal Sector	50	11.11 %	68	15.11 %	118	13.11 %
Miscellaneous Work including Domestic Help: Informal Sector	54	12%	32	7.11%	86	9.56%
Miscellaneous Work: Employed in the Private Sector	23	5.11%	18	4%	41	4.56%
Social Work: Employed in the NGO Sector	13	2.88%	0	0	13	1.44%
Employed in the Government Sector	0	0	0	0	0	0

No Work	59	13.13 %	76	16.89 %	135	15%
No Response	42	9.34%	50	11.12 %	92	10.23 %
Total	450	100	450	100	900	100

SOURCE: NHRC, 2017

Transgender individuals in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh engage in informal sector activities, such as Badhai/Blessings/Singing/Dancing, begging, and sex work, according to NHRC's 2017 data. These trends underscore the need for targeted support and formal job opportunities.

Chart 2: Graph on the Pattern of Employment/Livelihood



Source: NHRC, 2017

Transgender individuals are notably absent from government jobs and underrepresented in private and NGO sectors. This reflects systemic barriers to their economic inclusion, necessitating policy interventions for diversity and equal opportunities.

➤ Status of women in India

India, with a population exceeding 1.2 billion, has 586.4 million females facing significant challenges in education and employment. NSO data shows a literacy gap, with women at 70.3% compared to men at 84.7%. This disparity limits women's access to quality education and skilled professions, hindering personal development and advanced studies.



Source: India Discrimination Report 2022<sup>1</sup>

Women face challenges in accessing formal job opportunities, wage disparities, and societal norms favouring household roles. Despite talent, they are underrepresented in leadership and struggle with career progression and economic empowerment.

➤ Education of Women in India

India's female literacy rate was a mere 8.6% at independence, reflecting societal limitations imposed on women after their active role in the freedom struggle. While progress is evident with a 64.63% literacy rate in 2011,

---

<sup>1</sup> "Oxfam India's 'India Discrimination Report, 2022'"; 2022; <https://youthdestination.in/india-discrimination-report-2022/>

challenges persist. The current female rate is lower than males', standing at 81.3%, and lower than the global average of 79.7%, especially alarming in rural areas with high dropout rates among girls. Targeted interventions are crucial for gender equality in education nationwide.

Table 4: Literacy Rate of the Female Population in India from 1901 To 2011

Census year	% of female literacy
1951	8.86
1961	15.35
1971	21.97
1981	29.76
1991	39.29
2001	53.67
2010	65.46

Source: census 2011

The literacy rate of females in India has shown a steady increase over decades: 8.86% in 1951 to 65.46% in 2010, according to Census data. This upward trend reflects gradual improvements in female education, marking progress towards gender equality in literacy.

Table 5: State-Wise Literacy Rate in India 2021

State	Literacy rate in % (person)	Literacy rate in % (male)	Literacy rate in % (female)
NCT of Delhi	86.2	90.9	80.8
Uttar Pradesh	67.7	77.3	57.2

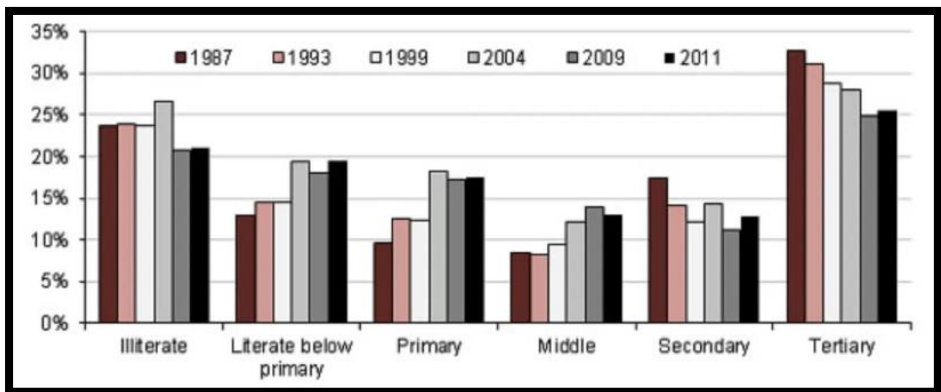
SOURCE: CENSUS 2011

In 2021, India's states showed varied literacy rates, with Delhi leading at 86.2%. Males had a higher rate (90.9%) than females (80.8%). In contrast, Uttar Pradesh had a lower rate of 67.7%, with males at 77.3% and females at 57.2%, indicating challenges in educational equity requiring targeted interventions.

### ➤ Employment of women in India

India saw a decline in women's workforce participation from 24% to 18% between 2010 and 2020. Oxfam India's 2022 report highlighted biases against women in employment, despite comparable qualifications to men, emphasizing the need for urgent and comprehensive strategies.

Chart 3: Employment: The Stark Contrast



Source: World Bank, 2015<sup>1</sup>

Efforts to promote gender equality haven't translated into equal representation for women in scientific roles in India. They make up only 14% of 280,000 professionals in research and development. Men dominate leadership roles, with 72.2% employed compared to 25% of women, highlighting the need for urgent strategies to bridge this gap and create an inclusive workforce.

Review of literature

<sup>1</sup> "Labour force participation rate of married women, by educational level"; World Bank Blogs; Janneke Pieters & Stephan Klasen; April 15, 2015; <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/current-rate-female-participation-india-s-labor-force-unlikely-increase>



- ✓ At the current rate, female participation in India's Labour force is unlikely to increase<sup>1</sup>

[Janneke Peiters & Stephan Klasen, April 15, 2015]

Despite significant educational and economic advancements, married women's labour force participation (FLFP) in urban India has stagnated around 18% since the mid-1980s. This stagnation undermines India's demographic dividend, as higher female employment rates are linked to increased productivity and economic growth.

Factors influencing this trend include societal norms, the income effect from rising male incomes, and complex education-FLFP dynamics. The U-shaped relationship between education and FLFP indicates societal stigmas and evolving dynamics affecting women's employment choices.

Moreover, the slow growth of white-collar jobs, preferred by educated women, limits their opportunities. Comprehensive policies addressing both supply and demand-side barriers are essential to leverage India's demographic dividend and promote women's economic empowerment.

- ✓ **Non-Binary Genders need more visibility in India's census 2021<sup>2</sup>**

[Anuj Behal; September 06, 2021; Monday]

India's 2011 Census first included the transgender population, estimating 4.8 million individuals. However, it categorized non-male and non-female identities simply as 'other,' assuming them to be transgender, which overlooked the diversity of non-binary identities such as intersex, agender, and gender-

---

<sup>1</sup> "At the current rate, female participation in India's Labour Force is unlikely to increase"; World Bank Blogs; Janneke Peiters & Stephan Klasen; April 15, 2015; <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/current-rate-female-participation-india-s-labor-force-unlikely-increase>

<sup>2</sup> "Non-binary Genders need more visibility in India's census 2021"; Down to Earth; Anuj Behal; September 06, 2021; Monday; <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/governance/non-binary-genders-need-more-visibility-in-india-s-census-2021-78844>

fluid individuals. This binary approach led to incomplete representation and exclusion of those outside the binary framework.

The binary classification extended to public facilities like toilets, where transgender individuals faced challenges due to the lack of dedicated or gender-neutral options. Despite guidelines for inclusivity, practical issues persisted, with transgender men and women encountering specific hurdles based on anatomy and societal biases. A more inclusive approach in census data, public infrastructure, and policies is needed to address the varied experiences of gender minorities.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. Analyse challenges faced by transgenders and women in employment, including recruitment discrimination.
2. Examine barriers in women and transgender education, like discrimination and policy gaps.
3. Assess how discrimination impacts women and transgender socio-economics.
4. Explore inclusive development strategies for women and transgender rights.

### **Methodology**

This research relies on secondary sources like the internet, national and international journals, government reports, census data, and relevant websites. It focuses on the socio-economic status of women and transgender individuals in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

### **Analysis of the Study**

- The study underscores discrimination faced by transgender individuals and women, highlighting societal stigma, legal obstacles, and limited access to education and employment opportunities.
- It advocates for inclusive development policies addressing these challenges, ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, and job

opportunities while combating societal biases and discriminatory practices.

- Historical references, including ancient texts, illuminate transgender individuals' historical acknowledgement in Indian society, adding depth to discussions on gender identities and societal norms.
- The study discusses government welfare schemes supporting transgender individuals and women, such as pension plans, scholarships, and skill development programs, showcasing efforts towards social and economic inclusivity.

### **Issues and Challenges faced by the women in India:**

1. Traditional gender norms in India assign domestic roles to girls, prioritizing household duties over education and careers, impacting literacy rates and job opportunities.
2. Women's safety concerns, including harassment and commute safety, deter higher education and certain jobs, contributing to lower literacy and limited employment choices.
3. Inadequate rural infrastructure, like lacking school facilities, discourages girls from education, impacting later job access.
4. Gender biases in education and employment hinder literacy and job prospects, with unequal opportunities and biases in hiring practices.
5. Economic disparities limit investment in girls' education, affecting literacy, employment, and economic empowerment.

### **Issues and Challenges concerning the status of the transgender community in India:**

1. In contemporary India, the transgender community, notably represented by Hijras, faces persistent societal prejudices, as evident in recent events. For example, in 2023, a Hijra was denied entry to a public venue due to their gender identity, despite legal reforms like the 2018 decriminalization of homosexuality. These incidents reveal the enduring gap between legal recognition and societal acceptance.

2. Employment discrimination against transgender individuals, including Hijras, remains widespread, as reported in 2022. This reflects broader biases in the job market, leading to their exclusion from formal sectors or exposure to hostile work environments due to systemic prejudices.
3. Legal challenges persist, with transgender individuals struggling to obtain accurate gender identity documents. Ongoing legal battles highlight the systemic barriers faced by Hijras and others in accessing essential rights and services.
4. Healthcare disparities are also significant, with transgender individuals, especially Hijras, experiencing discrimination and limited access to gender-affirming healthcare. Recent cases of mistreatment emphasize the urgent need for inclusive healthcare policies tailored to their needs.

### **Recommendations And Suggestions**

- Advocacy for legal protections and anti-discrimination laws is crucial for women and the transgender community in employment, education, and healthcare.
- Equal access to education, demonstrated by initiatives like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, should extend to transgender individuals for educational and professional growth.
- Inclusive job opportunities and workplace diversity, exemplified by companies like IBM India, should be promoted across sectors.
- Enhanced healthcare access and sensitivity to gender diversity are vital, as seen in initiatives like The Queer Affirmative Counselling Practice
- Strengthening community support and empowerment through advocacy and skill-building combat discrimination
- Awareness campaigns challenge norms and promote acceptance, such as the #ChangeTheClap campaign by Humsafar Trust.

### **Conclusion**

The study on the socio-economic status of transgender individuals and women in India reveals significant challenges rooted in societal norms, legal frameworks, and economic disparities. Pervasive discrimination limits access

to education, employment, and healthcare, compounded by stigma and violence, creating barriers to social inclusion and economic empowerment. It highlights the inter-sectional nature of these challenges, particularly for transgender individuals and women from marginalized communities like Dalits and tribal groups, who face compounded discrimination. Targeted interventions are needed to address gender-based and intersecting inequalities.

Holistic approaches focusing on education, skill development, healthcare access, and legal protections are essential. Promoting meaningful participation in decision-making and social acceptance is crucial. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, civil society organizations, and grassroots initiatives are vital for achieving gender equality and social justice.

## REFERENCES

- Behal, A. (2021, September 6). "Non-binary genders need more visibility in India's Census 2021". *Down to Earth*. Retrieved from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/governance/non-binary-genders-need-more-visibility-in-india-s-census-2021-78844>
- Census of India. (2011). *Population Census: Transgender in India*. Retrieved from <https://www.census2011.co.in/transgender.php>
- Indug. (2018, October 29). *India's relationship with the third gender*. UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog. Retrieved from <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2018/10/29/indias-relationship-with-the-third-gender/>
- Kapur, R. (2018, March). *Socio-economic status of the transgenders in India*. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323695173\\_Socio-Economic\\_Status\\_of\\_the\\_Trans-genders\\_in\\_India](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323695173_Socio-Economic_Status_of_the_Trans-genders_in_India)
- National Portal of India, Government of India. (n.d.). *Profile of India*. National Portal of India. Retrieved from <https://www.india.gov.in/india-glance/profile>
- NHRC. (2017, February). *Study on human rights of transgender as a third gender*. NHRC; Kerala Development Society, Delhi. Retrieved from [https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Study\\_HR\\_transgender\\_03082018.pdf](https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Study_HR_transgender_03082018.pdf)
- Oxfam India. (2022). *India Discrimination Report, 2022*. The Hindu. Retrieved from <https://youthdestination.in/india-discrimination-report-2022/>

- Pettagam, T. (2019, October 11). RTE Act 2009. TNPSC Theru Pettagam. Retrieved from <https://www.tnpsctheruvupettagam.com/articles-detail/rte-act-2009>
- Pieters, J., & Klasen, S. (2015, April 15). At the current rate, female participation in India's labour force is unlikely to increase. World Bank Blogs. Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/current-rate-female-participation-india-s-labor-force-unlikely-increase>
- Pieters, J., & Klasen, S. (2015, April 15). Labour force participation rate of married women, by educational level. World Bank Blogs. Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/current-rate-female-participation-india-s-labor-force-unlikely-increase>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Gender equality*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%20represent%20half,human%20potential%20and%20sustainable%20development.>

-----ॐ-----

## **BOOK REVIEW**

**Uma Jain (2023) *DEMYSTIFYING AND DIGNIFYING SINGLEHOOD: Life Journeys of Single Women Across the Globe,***

Libri Publishing, pages: 245, ISBN: 9781911451136

- **Dr Swati Partani**

### **Introduction**

The book “Demystifying and Dignifying Singlehood” by Uma Jain is a collection of narratives from fifteen single women, primarily from India, the USA, and the UK, who are single by circumstance or choice. This first edition, published by NTL Institute, an imprint of Libri Publishing, spans 245 pages. The glossy cover, featuring a woman walking down a road, complements the book’s theme. The stories are thoughtfully presented in fifteen chapters. The final two chapters analyse all the stories, highlighting the challenges and positive aspects of singlehood and showing how each woman copes with the traditional stereotypical patriarchal society.

Initially the reader is introduced to the upcoming stories, where the author weaves together many aspects of the traditional system of raising female children, which strengthened her choice of singlehood. She elucidates the journey of being a single woman, detailing the challenges faced, such as loneliness, exclusion, indignity, and lack of connectedness, and how these women embraced singlehood with courage, hope, and a sense of fulfilment. This collection of stories emerged from a series of workshops conducted with 14 single women. These narratives provide a comprehensive reading experience for those interested in the untold stories of single women, whether they are single men, single women, or parents of single daughters.

In the first chapter “Choices, Consequences, and Meaning-Making: Living My Values and Truth,” the author narrates her journey of singlehood, which began within a traditional family system where she grew up with only female siblings. The story portrays how a lack of appreciation at home led the author to seek recognition through education and professional success. It captures the

oscillation between her outer and inner worlds: the outer world demanding conformity to societal expectations of appearance and grooming to become a committed wife, and her inner self resisting gender-based compromises and desiring an egalitarian relationship. The narrative takes a poignant turn when the family pressures her to leave home due to the embarrassment of having an unmarried daughter. As she ventures into new territories, her life becomes more challenging, with each relationship ending painfully. These experiences initially reinforced the patriarchal idea that she was not attractive enough by societal standards. However, these painful moments eventually became a catalyst for her spiritual journey, leading her to gradually accept the cosmic plan and live a life of value, free from the illusions of marriage. This story inspires readers to develop a positive approach, encouraging them to redefine societal norms with courage, without feeling undervalued, and to find their own niche.

The second chapter, titled “Single: Another (Way to Be) Other” from the USA, begins by addressing the complexity of racial discrimination. Similar to the experiences of the previous author, she was ostracized for her appearance and subjected to bullying multiple times, finding solace in books. As the eldest sibling, she had to care for her younger siblings, despite a home environment that was not conducive to her mental health. The story is written succinctly, with the author discussing the solitude and pain she experienced. Her singlehood was due to circumstances, but she still seeks a meaningful relationship to form a new identity.

“Happily, Single,” the third chapter, is a story from India that starts on a positive note, despite singlehood being due to circumstances. Like in other stories, the narrator had bad experiences growing up due to her looks. Ridiculed and commented upon by relatives, even in the presence of her parents, leaves the reader in awe. Adhering to traditional gender norms and bias in her family compels the author into an arranged marriage, which eventually turns out to be a disaster. The author narrates how this abusive relationship compelled her to leave her husband and take responsibility for her



4-year-old daughter. She had to return to her parents to look after her child while she worked. Due to her traumatic experiences, this relationship also faced challenges but eventually resolved over time. The entire story depicts the helplessness of a single woman who is also a mother trying to fit into a so-called normal society. The story takes a new turn when the author chooses to be happy and engage in self-love practices. She rediscovers her hobbies, gradually lets go of the past, and starts to live life on her own terms. The author emerges as a strong single mother who eventually chooses to heal peacefully and now celebrates her singlehood.

In the fourth chapter, “Why I Chose to Remain Single: To Get Freedom From, Freedom To, or Inner Freedom,” the author reflects on her spiritual maturity throughout the story, stemming from her religious family environment. Although migration to a different part of the country leads to cultural conflict, it reinforces her belief in avoiding the institution of marriage. The author embarks on a journey of freedom, emphasizing that freedom is not given but taken. Her education and engagement in spiritual practices mould her into a confident person. She rejects the idea of marriage not due to feminism but because of her spiritual practices. This confidence reveals her strong character, as she not only earns a living but also supports her extended family with dignity. The author articulates the types of freedom: positive (actual), negative (freedom from), and inner (leading towards spirituality). Her journey towards her true self helps her serve a larger purpose in society, contributing to women's studies on a macro level. She never laments the conservative society but instead uses her spiritual power to live a peaceful life as she celebrates her singlehood.

In the fifth chapter, the author reflects on her life journey from a blissful young marriage to divorce and the subsequent 20-year period of singlehood. She delves into the reasons behind her divorce, primarily differing views on parenthood. Following the breakup, she embarked on a journey of exploration, seeking intensity rather than long-term commitment in relationships. Despite occasional loneliness, she found fulfilment in her career, global adventures, and

personal growth. The author challenges societal norms that equate a woman's happiness with marital status, emphasizing her contentment and independence. This chapter portrays her evolution towards self-discovery and acceptance of a single life, rejecting societal pressures and defining happiness on her own terms.

The sixth chapter “Single women in men’s World”, gives a heartfelt look into the life of being single, mixing the author's personal experiences with observations about society. Starting with a reflection on Ratan Tata’s life, it challenges the idea that getting married is the ultimate goal. Quotes from Bella DePaulo and Jessica Francis Kane add depth to the discussion. The author shares the loneliness and judgment singles face, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and compares it to the often-hidden struggles within marriages. The hopeful vision of a world where single women are accepted and respected is inspiring. While the article could be more organized and transitioned smoother, its honesty and thought-provoking message stand out. It ultimately calls for society to value people for who they are, not their marital status, and encourages finding peace and acceptance in one’s life.

Deborah Howard's seventh chapter, “My Non-traditional Journey,” candidly explores her path from a focused career woman to navigating marriage, divorce, and ultimately embracing singlehood for two decades. Howard challenges societal norms and personal traumas that shaped her views on relationships and identity. Her journey unfolds with refreshing honesty, revealing how childhood abuse influenced her need for protection and validation through relationships. Despite initial reluctance towards marriage, her unconventional wedding and subsequent challenges within it highlight her defiance of societal expectations. The chapter presents in detail Howard's liberation upon divorcing, confronting deep-seated insecurities, and redefining her self-worth. Her participation in a workshop on single women’s identities further deepened her understanding, shedding light on societal categorizations and personal autonomy. Howard’s narrative powerfully illustrates the complexities of single motherhood, societal pressures, and the pursuit of

personal fulfilment outside traditional roles. Howard's story challenges readers to reconsider societal norms and embrace personal autonomy, offering a valuable perspective on the diverse paths to happiness and fulfilment in life.

In eighth chapter, "My Life's Shades and Colours," tells story of author growing up as a girl in Bihar, India, facing many challenges. From a young age, she felt the pressure of societal expectations that devalued girls and favoured boys. She experienced gender and caste discrimination, and unfortunately, she also faced sexual abuse without support from her family. Despite these difficulties, the author was a bright student and pursued her education passionately, even though her path was filled with obstacles. She resisted societal norms like dowry and sought a partner who respected her views, which made finding a husband difficult. Eventually, she chose to live independently and focus on her career. She decided to become a single mother by adopting a daughter, which brought her joy and new challenges. She faced societal judgment but remained committed to giving her daughter a good life. Her journey is about overcoming hardships, embracing self-love, and creating her own path, showing incredible strength and resilience.

In the ninth narrative, "In pursuit of Learning and Freedom", the author shares happy memories from her childhood. She enjoyed family and social life, living fully without regrets. Choosing to stay single was important to her because she valued her freedom to work and explore life. Her story captures the essence of being single as a journey of self-discovery and independence. Reflecting on her rich childhood experiences, she shows how these moments built her love for learning and growth. Her educational and career path highlights a commitment to personal development without following societal norms. The narrative emphasizes the strength she gained from her family and the satisfaction of living an authentic life. It is a touching tribute to the joy and empowerment that comes from embracing one's unique path.

In tenth narrative "An Unexpected and (Mostly) Happy State of Being," is a heartfelt and honest look at the ups and downs of being single, especially as a

woman. At 65, author reflects on her life, acknowledging both the personal and professional challenges she has faced. She shares how her journey, though tough at times, has been filled with unique experiences, risks, and adventures that she navigated with grace and dignity. She talks about the common assumptions people make about single women, like thinking there must be something wrong with them or that they're afraid of commitment. She explains that for her, being single wasn't a conscious choice but a result of her life circumstances and upbringing. Raised by a strong single mother, she never saw being single as a disadvantage. Despite the freedom and independence, she enjoyed, she also addresses the fear and vulnerability that come with being a single woman in a patriarchal society. She shares her experiences of unwanted attention and the constant worry for her safety. Overall, she celebrates her life, filled with accomplishments and deep friendships, and challenges the societal norms that often judge single women. Her story is inspiring and offers a new perspective on living a fulfilling life on one's own terms.

In the eleventh article “The Tortoise on the Road”, the author writes an honest and open narrative, she shares her challenging yet fulfilling journey of singlehood. She reflects on the ups and downs, risks, and adventures of her life, feeling no regrets about her choices. She took ownership of her decisions and maintained a life of grace and dignity. Singlehood taught her valuable lessons of patience, resilience, and emotional mastery. Her solitary moments helped her transcend personal desires and focus on duty and work. Despite societal expectations and the lack of role models, she became the first psychologist in Central India in private practice. The author's story highlights her professional and personal accomplishments, which she considers superior to many of her married contemporaries. Raised in a disciplined environment, she faced societal pressures differently than her brother. Her choice to remain single allowed her to avoid the traditional constraints of marriage and pursue a meaningful life. She overcame health challenges, faced societal biases, and found solace in her professional achievements and family support. Through

determination and resilience, she has embraced her individuality and found happiness in singlehood.

In the twelfth chapter, a traditional Indian family, a victim of patriarchy, is depicted where men's actions are justified and women's lives revolve around their satisfaction. The environment forces people to believe in incorrect notions and reinforces warped ways of thinking. The protagonist grows up as someone to whom male approval matters a lot. In this pursuit, she completely remoulds herself according to her husband and his family's standards to the point of losing her individuality, somehow convincing herself that this was the norm and unable to break the faulty generational thinking. After her husband's demise, she didn't know what to do, as society is quick to judge and comment on widows, whose lives are restricted and shackled. "Do this, don't do that", they are set to follow certain norms rather than grieving in their unique ways without being commented upon, as she narrated. Slowly, she takes control of her own life, navigating it and giving herself a sense of purpose. Finally, she starts living for herself and her daughter, realizing that she doesn't require anyone's approval at that point. She acknowledges that although she has changed and everything is happening for the better, she still has miles to go. This time, unlike before, she is equipped to handle it. This narrative clearly depicts the conservative practices of the society.

In the thirteenth chapter "Reclaiming Myself- Raising my Dreams", there is this story of an African American woman, who is a powerful testament to resilience and self-discovery. She bravely shares her journey after a challenging divorce, navigating the complexities of dating and career in the face of societal expectations and personal struggles. Her honesty about the pressures she faced, from family dynamics to cultural norms, resonates deeply. What stands out is her determination to prioritize her own growth and happiness. Despite setbacks, she pursues her educational goals, showing remarkable strength and resilience. Her journey isn't just about overcoming obstacles; it's about reclaiming her identity and finding fulfilment on her own terms. Her story is inspiring because it speaks to universal themes of personal growth and empowerment. It reminds us that the path to self-discovery is often

filled with challenges, but also moments of clarity and transformation. Through her experiences, she encourages others to reflect on their own journeys and embrace authenticity and resilience in pursuit of their dreams.

The chapter fourteen is about a woman's journey to find herself amidst conflicting advice from her parents and society. Growing up, she loved romantic movies that portrayed the idea of finding your other half. Yet, her parents told her to be independent and earn her own living while also saying she should marry someone they chose for her. As a South Indian family in Mumbai, they maintained their traditions while adapting to city life. She did well in school and worked hard, becoming a successful manager at a young age, which was unusual for women at that time. When it was time to find a husband, she found the process old-fashioned and frustrating. She wanted to find a partner who matched her ambitions and values. Facing pressure and disappointment, she focused on her career to cope. She eventually moved into her own home, which was a big step for her independence. She travelled alone, faced challenges, and had rewarding experiences. Over time, she realized she was happy being single, pursuing hobbies like dance and spirituality. When she finally married, her years of being independent helped her build a strong, equal partnership. The chapter highlights her journey towards independence and self-reliance, showing gratitude for her unique path in life.

The last story "Of Freedom and Fairy Tales", presents, author's life as a story of discovery and growth. From her childhood in a bustling city in India to her journey into adulthood, she embraced both science and art with equal passion. Her academic success led her to a career in behavioural sciences, where she thrived in corporate settings, gaining valuable insights and experience. Amid her professional life, she discovered a deep love for painting and writing. These creative outlets became her sanctuary, allowing her to explore emotions and express herself beyond the confines of her career. They became tools for introspection and self-discovery, helping her navigate personal challenges and find fulfilment. Her journey also included a deliberate choice to embrace singlehood, emphasizing her independence and challenging societal expectations. Through her writing and personal interactions, she explored

themes of vulnerability, strength, and the complexities of human relationships. Her story is one of resilience and authenticity, inspiring others to embrace their true selves and pursue their passions. The author's legacy is not just in her professional achievements but in her courage to live authentically and passionately, making a lasting impact on those around her.

In chapter sixteen, the author identifies common patterns across all the stories, which I agree with. Each case is unique, yet they share some commonalities as they reflect upon their journeys. Singlehood has emerged from a growing understanding of relationships. For some, there were painful memories, while others grew to positively accept their status. The author summarizes how the idea of feminism quietly entered their lives, leading to the establishment of singlehood identities. Common factors for the single status included social pressure, patriarchal norms, the quest for equality, escape from painful events, and preserving their own identity. She further highlights societal transitions, such as parents supporting their single daughters, breaking relationship stereotypes, and challenging societal norms. This shift is evidently helping women boost their self-esteem, incline towards spirituality, and nurture themselves to live respectfully. The author also presents the challenges faced by single women in being accepted by society while chasing the mirage of marriage or stable relationships, where they wanted to be accepted as they are. Often, their sexuality was misunderstood. While sex might not be the central focus of marriage, they craved a loving relationship within it. The author busts myths about singlehood in each of the narratives she presents. Initially, the idea of singlehood was not welcomed and received undignified reactions from society. However, as they progressed further in life, they found their unique way of living joyfully.

In the epilogue, the author not only canvasses diverse portraits from each story of single women but also discusses the social status of men. Men are becoming aware of the societal transition and how women long for the acceptance of their true identities. The author suggests that men must adopt new roles to foster an egalitarian society. It's time to change the age-old norms

imposed on women. There is an urgent need to envision an inclusive society where acceptance will be the greatest boon for all.

“Demystifying and Dignifying Singlehood” by Uma Jain is a masterful representation of singlehood majorly from India, USA & UK. Through her meticulous approach of connecting with all the authors through workshops, each narrator is able to present their story of singlehood. Uma Jain transports her readers to the journeys of challenges faced by single women and their eventual reconciliation with the idea of singlehood and acceptance. Her ability to craft complex characters is evident in the protagonist, whose journey is both compelling and relatable. The pacing is well-maintained, keeping the reader engaged from start to finish. Through themes of love, loss, and resilience, Uma Jain delivers a powerful narrative throughout that resonates deeply. The balance of various perspectives, from challenges to finding peace across all the stories, makes this book a delightful read.

**Reference:**

Jain Uma (2023). *Demystifying and Dignifying Singlehood: Life Journeys of Single women across the Globe*. NTL Institute

\*\*\*

**Meenu Anand (ed) (2020) *GENDER AND MENTAL HEALTH – Combining Theory and Practice*, Singapore: Springer, pages: 494, ISBN: 978-981-15-5392-9, Price: \$ 129.99**

- Dr. Cicilia Chettiar

In her introduction, Meenu Anand sets the tone for the book, establishing the relevance of the book. Coming out of a strongly patriarchal nation, the relevance of understanding the connection between gender and mental health is elucidated. The nexus between social norms, bias against women and the presence of maladaptive behaviours in women is an essential point to be recognised. The DSM 5 and its many categories starkly refer to thoughts and behaviours as a marker, without considering the conditions that may lead to these behaviours. Anchoring a woman’s maladaptive condition in her biology



does her a grave disservice. Anand attempts to lift the veil on these and many other environmental reasons that lead to gender differences in behaviour cognition and affect.

She raises a very important point about normality. What can we consider as normal? The tendency to associate the majority view as normal is being challenged. The majority views currently are dependent on the buying power of those that benefit from a certain position. Politics, media, medicine – all are stake holders in major decisions and policy changes addressing mental health. When the very definition of health is not clear and complete, it's quite worrying that identifying ill-health has become so easy.

Identifying gender as one essential facet that affects the presence or absence of a disorder is a posture one must look at very hard and very long. The very notion of gender changes as per the requirements of the times, and in this dynamic scenario, connecting a social norm to a diagnosis is not just wrong but extremely foolish.

Anand has attempted to capture these voices of doubt, dissent and discord through the sixteen chapters of her book. Not only do they raise questions, but they also elaborate, explain and expound the reasons why studying this network of associations between gender and mental health is relevant for the benefit of humans.

The book has been divided into three sections including sixteen chapters. The first section comprising five chapters includes topics related to conceptual understanding and a general overview of the topic.

The first chapter emphasizes that mental health outcomes are shaped by socio-cultural factors, gender stereotypes, and discrimination, which affect women, men, and transgender individuals differently. It critiques the dominant biomedical model of mental health, which focuses on biological factors such as genetics and brain chemistry, arguing that this approach neglects social and environmental aspects of mental health. Both Meenu Anand and Nilima Srivastava provide a holistic picture on the topic being addressed in this book.

Interestingly in the next chapter Bhargavi V. Davar determines that too much emphasis on the social determinants of depression led to women's emotional states being identified as collateral damage in a society dealing in injustice and gender-based discrimination. And the ludicrousness of it all, was not a correction in the social system but a bio-medical treatment for women. She describes the situation as a 'psychiatrization of social justice issues,' a very apt description. Her paper revolves around three aspects of emotion. According to her the colonisation of women's mood led to describing emotion as universal, individualistic and mental. The difference between emotion and mood is clearly explained so that a lay reader may understand. She presents a very cogent and powerful analysis describing how Indian practices were judged as inferior by colonizers because they were different. She further establishes the economic angle to feminizing emotions. Through the local narratives of Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, Davar connects the individual to the communal, the therapeutics to the aesthetics. This chapter should be made essential reading for every student studying psychology in India.

Chakraborti further elaborates with detail on how the psychosocial understanding of mental health still boils down to the male strength and female vulnerability dichotomy. Besides listing out the causes she provides three case vignettes to drive home the point that being a woman and being mentally ill is a "double curse." Once again, the importance of community, the justice system and a strong social support system are emphasized to bring about greater relief when considering mental health for women.

Bhatia and Goyal also address the gender differentials in mental health where they emphasize the perspective of stigma. While the bio-medical perspective and statistics are a little repetitive as they were discussed in earlier chapters, the description of gender-specific diagnoses and the role of hormones is elaborated on in detail. An essential point raised is the authoritarian manner of treatment women in Primary Health Care centres receive that prevents them from sharing their psychological distress. Many of these women suffer from anxiety or depression and these conditions are overlooked, with symptomatic relief being the primary goal. The chapter ends with suggestions about what can be the

relief road and refers to the constitutional rights of women to receive benefits that can enable them socially and economically.

Malathi Adusumalli speaks specifically about the cultural notions of mental health. The recognition of Western countries as being multi-cultural and countries like India and China not being recognised for the cultural variation they offer. She uses two indigenous communities *Jad Bhotiyas* and *Chenchus* to further explain this difference. The *Jad Bhotiyas* practices include the natural and supernatural and the authors points out the relevance of recognising cultural spiritual practices and beliefs even though they may be diagnosed as a disorder in Western manuals. The *Chenchus* are another forest community whose wisdom in healing is neither recognised nor tapped for the potential it has. All kinds of illnesses are treated by medicines available through the natural forest reserves and through praying to spirits and deities. The changing natural habitats of groups like these affect their healing processes that are dependent on their natural resources. So, policies that collaborate with the communities and their local knowledge are essential in the context of health and well-being.

The next section covers five chapters that fall under the heading of Mental health scenario in India: A gendered lens. It begins with a journey of the #MeToo movement in India. The author provides a summary of changes needed to bolster women's mental health. Identifying women as oppressed beings who are slowly waking up to their rights, he addresses the possible solutions as provided by different experts. The importance of positive mental health in the narrative of mental health and gender has been emphasized. Here too, social change, bringing more awareness to men and providing emotional care to men and women are identified as possible solutions to the rape culture narrative currently surrounding our country today. While rape has been recognised as a power play, it is heartening to know that the role of mental health is also recognised.

In the next chapter, Abhishek Thakur introduced disability into the discussion. Being a woman with a mental health condition is a "double curse" already and

when the woman in question has a disability, the conditions become even more tragic. Both conditions lead to the lack of opportunities due to the identification of the body with a social norm. Stigma, low self-concept and confidence, neglect and abuse. Uniting these two physical concepts under one cause and highlighting how the struggle of one group echoes the struggle of the other, the author evokes questions on human rights, especially in situations where both groups – the disabled and the female – converge to form the disabled female. The similarity between the two has been very interestingly brought with the support of feminist theory.

Any discussion on mental health is incomplete without a reference to schizophrenia. Amongst mental disorders, it claims a unique place and due to its presentations in the various media, often appears as a very glamorous disorder to those who wish to work in the area of mental health. The authors, Mahapatra and Deshpande, show the differences and similarities in the prevalence and onset of male schizophrenia and female schizophrenia. The outcomes, and their impact on fertility, reproduction and the quality of life for both men and women are discussed. Interestingly, the authors identify differences in outcomes differing in the quality of life, a reflection of social prejudice and discrimination towards women with psychotic conditions. While men with maladaptive behaviours would still be considered eccentric or authoritarian, women may not get this latitude. The authors emphasize the need for equality in treatment and care-giving, which in the case of women is compromised. Intimate partner violence occurs more in women than women, affecting outcomes for schizophrenic women more than for schizophrenic man.

In the next chapter, the author Patel, provides a succinct reckoning of mental health concerns in urban India. She explores the concept of disorders both in breadth and depth covering issues related to politics and culture. She also raises an important aspect of counselling with the therapist given a position of superiority and the client placed in a lower position. This again reflects inequality. The entire gamut of mental health in terms of the lifespan needs to be addressed, special conditions like epilepsy and women in custody have been exhaustively described. The role of Self-Help groups is elaborated on and the

need for training in counselling is emphasized. The connection between healing and empowerment is emphasized.

In the chapter by Saumya Uma, the relevance of the law and its failings have been described. The author points out that the phrase “unsoundness of the mind” has been used in 150 statutes and is yet not defined. How can the lawmakers interpret something that they cannot define? The chapter is extremely interesting and informative especially in cases like PMS where a legal precedent exists, and people need to be made aware of the extremes of emotion and violent behaviour that can occur as a result of this physical condition. The chapter also explores conditions under which women can seek relief under the clause of diminished responsibility. The author attempts to associate the legal situation in India by also providing perspective on what is happening globally when it comes to law and women’s mental health.

The last section consists of six chapters that are field narratives related to gender and mental health. The first chapter in this section covers psychosocial rehabilitation by the two authors, historically and what the future looks like. It describes the types of services and the principles involved in psychosocial rehabilitation, which can be very helpful for someone looking to understand the outcomes for women in mentally precarious spaces. It also maps the journey from the pre-independence era to post-independence and the development of prominent institutes like CIP, CMC and NIMHANS. Rehabilitation is poorly understood by the vast majority and this chapter provides a detailed explanation of what it should be and what it currently is. Future trends are also mapped and the importance of good care facilities especially in chronic conditions is described.

Banyan, a remarkable feat by two driven women, who over two decades ago recognised the lack of voice that the mentally unwell women faced, is presented here under the authorship of four people, one of whom is the co-founder of Banyan. The issue of homelessness and poverty exacerbates mental health problems and the chapter provides the statistics to understand the size of the problem. The Banyan was not just an idle dream, but a collaboration of

corporates and individuals who acted as responsible allies. The success of their program spread from Tamil Nadu to Maharashtra to Andhra Pradesh and is a shining example of how sustainable solutions can be created with careful planning and organising. Banyan is now even involved in policy drafting and their experience in the entire journey from the entry of a homeless woman to the institute to the aftercare, day-to-day activities, counselling, treatment, and skilling can provide a useful roadmap to all others interested in bringing about change. The chapter covers their working style and their perspective on reintegration and aftercare as essential steps in the process of equality and equity building in mental health.

Another movement that has made a mark in women's mental health is Tarasha and the authors document the learnings made from their journey too. While banyan was a movement initiated by individuals, Tarasha was the outcome of a community-based field action project by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. It is an example of how a study need not be restricted to just publishing and statement-making. The historical victory of obtaining adult women with no family support a hospital discharge was Tarasha's first victory. Again, although TISS was involved, it was due to the study and direction provided by a motivated individual that led to the success of Tarasha. The chapter covers three case studies and the different steps involved in reintegrating women back into mainstream life and is another example of how motivation with direction and the right form of institutional support can bring about cyclonic success for even such complex and dynamic social issues. Obtaining a national identity through PAN and Aadhar was not just about following a rule, but about giving the women an identity other than the one slapped on them by society.

The next chapter outlines important gender-relevant features of the Indian Penal System or the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita as it is now to be known. The chapter records various statistics on gender, childcare, and occupancy rates across the various institutions in India. The impact of mental illness on rehabilitation with gender as a mediating factor throws light on the need for a gender-responsive approach. All statistics as based in 2016 and may seem a little dated. The theoretical basis for the gendered differences in elaborated on

from the Indian perspective. The path forward according to the authors requires all stakeholders to be trauma-informed so that interventions and support do not retraumatize the women. This chapter steps away from the other chapters in this section in that it does not cover any intervention or any movement in support of mental health. However, the relevance of the legal system in both prevention and care so that these organisations may accomplish what they set out to do is clarified.

Mehac is another example of a community-based mental health service, based out of Kerala. The model involves local allies and empowering of the community to provide free mental health services to the affected. The NGO partners with clinics and destitute homes and focuses on rehabilitation, psychoeducation for the family and awareness at the company level. The model has successfully tapped into volunteering services to create advocates of mental health. This is another model that has found support from the Banyan's programs. Such stories provide hope that when solutions are sought, agents of change present themselves. Mehac aims to face the sustainability challenge by including ASHA and Kudumbashree program workers as part of their mental health support community. Using existing frameworks to reach out and cast a wider net is a lesson that can be learnt from Mehac.

The last chapter focuses on a strengths-based approach as an addition to the existing initiatives in the journey of mental health and gender. While the concern about violence against women has been long-standing and loud, the efforts to reduce this violence are like pushing against a stone wall. Where cracks appear in the wall, lessons are learned and applied to other places. The focus on diagnosis, treatment and prevention all seems to have a problem-based approach. The strengths-based approach attempts a more positive route with a focus on what works to overcome what doesn't work. The chapter summarises violence against women nationally and internationally and presents certain field-based narratives based on research by one of the authors. This chapter emphasizes the biopsychosocial model and the benefits of a strengths-based approach based on its strategies are discussed in detail.

The book makes for engrossing reading across its 248 pages. The many aspects of gender and mental health are covered in detail and the narrative flows from one end of the country to another. It is a complete book for anyone who is interested in understanding the evolution, growth and path ahead of mental health care of women in India, complete with case studies of individuals and organisations who have been the beneficiaries or benefactors.

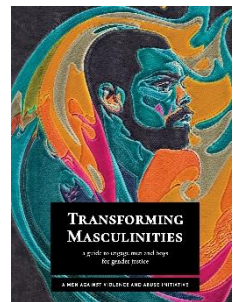
\*\*\*

**M. Altamash Khan with contributions from Harish Sadani, Adv. Monika Sakhrani, Rashmi Lamba and Zameer Kamble, (Author and Editor), *Transforming Masculinities: A Guide to Engage Men and Boys for Gender Justice*, Illustrations and Paintings by Rumi Harish and Design by Shivani, Mumbai: Men Against Violence and Abuse, pages: 174**

**- Prof. Vibhuti Patel**

### **Introduction**

Manual on “Transforming Masculinities”, crafted by Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) has a deep-rooted alignment with constitutional and feminist principles of gender justice. This manual is a valuable addition to the body of literature for gender sensitisation to reach out to boys and men.



### **Perspective**

It is envisioned with a conviction that men and boys are equal stakeholders in the struggle for gender equality. The manual is informed by responsiveness to intersectional vulnerabilities of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, region and gender that perpetuate varied forms of violence and abuse. The manual convincingly explains social determinants of hypermasculinity internalised by individuals of all gender spectrums, methods of challenging them and moving towards violence-free relationships based on mutual respect and gender equality. The course content of the Manual is designed in an engaging style that ensures participatory methods of dealing with concepts such as sex/gender



systems, patriarchy, gender stereotypes, deconstruction, gender norms, institutional impact mapping, inequality, discrimination, systems of power, power dynamics and privileges, intersectionality, inclusivity, equality and equity. With the help of exercises, energizers and icebreakers, simulations, games, diagram on Patriarchy Tree, Gender based violence pyramid, figure on Gender bred Person and flow chart on Privilege Bingo the manual unpacks masculinities, analyses patriarchal structures and systems that control sexuality, labour, fertility of persons.

### **Content**

The manual compares traditional masculinities defined by family, kinship network, media, state, educational institutions, political and criminal justice system with Alternative Positive Masculinity committed to gender diversity, plurality of lifestyles/life choices and non-violence, empowering marginalized genders and solidarity of with historically suppressed castes, religious and ethnic communities. The case studies on sexual harassment at the workplace and stigma for persons with mental health challenges are sensitively presented and followed up by a session for reflections on developing empathy and emotional intelligence. Each module's stories portray different scenarios with utmost gender responsiveness that result in critical questioning of internalised values. The concepts such as consent (freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic and unconditional) and rejection are conveyed in terms of the creation of a safe and supportive environment and democratic conduct in private and public life. The module on 'Collaboration and Partnerships' convincingly advocates for collective efforts for transformative change by discussing successful global and national level campaigns and best practices to address gender-based violence. The Module on Sustaining the Movement provides food for thought for strategic thinking and tactical action agenda followed by dealing with a pyramid of gender-based violence. The modules on sexuality, beyond gender binary/sexual diversity, the gender-bred person add great value to the manual. Detailed profile of human rights and law, constitutional guarantees, affirmative action, Special Legislations for Women: Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment, Protection of Women from

Domestic Violence Act, 2005 make this manual full-proof to create a gender-sensitive citizenry. The module on 'Viewing film through a feminist lens' is aimed at getting cinematic reflections by understanding societal constructs through feature films and documentaries.

### **For Whom?**

As MAVA always shares its knowledge resources in the most effective and impactful way, this manual will also have a great ripple effect on challenging unequal gender norms and gendered violence. The manual will inspire the criminal justice system, media houses, government institutions and the corporate sector to incorporate its content in their employees' orientation programmes, induction courses, and staff development workshops. This manual will prove to be a valuable resource for school and college teachers, human rights educators, animators of community-based and civil society organisations, women's rights groups and youth associations. I express my heartfelt congratulations to the MAVA team for their hard work and insightful content that touches both the head and the heart.

\*\*\*

**Roy, Disari, & Guha Roy, Priyanka, (Eds.), *Empowering Women: Reflections and Trajectories*. Kolkata: Manav Publication, 2022.  
pages 189, Price Rs. 500, ISSN: 978-939046200-1**

- Dr. Vaishali Ojha

In the wake of ongoing feminist movements across the globe, the question of women's empowerment remains a central concern in contemporary discourse. From historical injustices to persistent gender disparities, the quest for gender equality continues to shape social, political, and economic landscapes worldwide. "Empowering Women: Reflections and Trajectories" is a seminal anthology that delves deep into the complex and multifaceted journey of women's empowerment in India. Edited by Dr. Disari Roy and Dr. Priyanka Guha Roy, this comprehensive collection of scholarly works offers a profound

exploration of the challenges, triumphs, and trajectories of women's empowerment over the past century and beyond.

The book sets the stage for contemplation by posing a thought-provoking question about the nature of power and its relation to women's empowerment. Drawing on insights from anthropology and sociology, the foreword challenges conventional notions of power and explores the intricate interplay between power dynamics and gender relations. Through a historical lens, the foreword traces the origins of gender disparities and examines the enduring impact of patriarchy on societal structures. By framing empowerment as a social phenomenon shaped by historical forces, the foreword lays the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of women's empowerment in India.

The preface provides a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that influence women's empowerment in India. It highlights the significance of women's contributions to economic activities, social development, and family welfare. Despite advancements in women's rights, the preface acknowledges the persistent challenges faced by women, particularly those in marginalized communities. From gender-based violence to systemic discrimination, the preface underscores the urgent need for collective action to address structural barriers to women's empowerment. By situating women's empowerment within the broader framework of human rights and social justice, the preface sets the stage for an insightful exploration of empowerment trajectories in India.

The anthology is divided into three thematic sections, each offering a unique perspective on women's empowerment:

**Women in Retrospect: Welcoming Positive Social Change:** This section delves into historical contexts and societal transformations that have shaped women's empowerment in India. Through a series of insightful essays, contributors examine key milestones in the journey towards gender equality, from ancient civilizations to contemporary feminist movements. Drawing on historical narratives, folklore, and cultural traditions, the chapter illuminates the resilience and agency of women across different epochs. By unpacking the

complexities of gender dynamics in historical contexts, the chapter offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of women's empowerment in India.

**Gender and Media: Addressing Gender Stereotypes and Upholding Gender Equality:** The second thematic section critically examines the role of media in perpetuating gender stereotypes and shaping societal norms. Through a series of interdisciplinary analyses, contributors explore how media representations influence perceptions of gender and identity. From advertising to mass media portrayals, the chapter highlights the power dynamics that underlie media discourses on gender. By advocating for more inclusive and equitable representations, the chapter calls attention to the importance of challenging stereotypical depictions of women and promoting gender equality in media narratives.

**Addressing Gender-Based Violence: Human Rights of Women:** This section confronts the pervasive issue of gender-based violence and its impact on women's lives. Through a series of empirical studies and policy analyses, contributors shed light on the root causes of gender-based violence and advocate for systemic reforms to address this pressing issue. From domestic violence to sexual assault, the chapter highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to prevent violence, protect survivors, and promote gender equality. By centring on the voices of survivors and activists, the chapter underscores the importance of collective action to end gender-based violence and uphold the human rights of women.

### **Conclusion: Towards a More Inclusive and Equitable Future**

In conclusion, "Empowering Women: Reflections and Trajectories" offers a comprehensive and insightful exploration of the complexities of women's empowerment in India. Through a nuanced analysis of historical contexts, societal dynamics, and cultural nuances, the anthology sheds light on the challenges, triumphs, and trajectories of women's empowerment over the past century and beyond. By centring the voices of marginalized women and highlighting grassroots initiatives, the anthology underscores the importance of collective action to address systemic barriers to women's empowerment.

Moving forward, the anthology serves as a call to action for scholars, activists, policymakers, and citizens alike to work towards a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

The book contextualizes the significance of women's empowerment in contemporary society, emphasizing the persistent challenges faced by women despite advancements in gender equality initiatives. With a keen awareness of the multifaceted nature of gender discrimination, the editors set the stage for a comprehensive exploration of women's empowerment through twelve meticulously curated chapters.

Each chapter offers a unique perspective on women's empowerment, addressing a wide range of themes such as political activism, economic autonomy, cultural representation, and gender-based violence. Dr. Debjani Halder's chapter on the political construction of love and intimacy within the Naxalite movement provides a compelling feminist analysis of personal relationships amidst political turmoil.

Dr. Nibedita Bayen's exploration of post-liberal food security and livestock production highlights the intersectionality of gender and economic empowerment, showcasing women's agency in rural livelihoods. Similarly, Dr. Srinwanti Mukhopadhyay's chapter on Marwari women challenges stereotypes of domestic subjugation, revealing narratives of resilience and empowerment within patriarchal structures.

The anthology also delves into cultural and spiritual dimensions of women's empowerment, with chapters examining gender notions in sacred spaces and the portrayal of women in mass media. Additionally, Dr. Mary Vanlalthanpui's chapter on the Mizo Women's Organization's efforts against sexual violence underscores the importance of grassroots activism in combating gender-based atrocities.

Furthermore, the book addresses the critical issue of gender-based violence, reaffirming the human rights imperative of ensuring women's safety and dignity. Through nuanced analyses and empirical research, contributors

illuminate the systemic challenges and propose pathways for meaningful change.

Each chapter presents meticulous research and analysis, backed by scholarly rigor and a commitment to gender equality. Whether examining women's participation in cultural rituals or their activism against sexual violence, the contributors offer nuanced perspectives that enrich our understanding of empowerment dynamics.

Moreover, the inclusion of diverse voices and topics, ranging from colonial India to contemporary Mizoram, ensures a comprehensive exploration of women's experiences across time and space. This interdisciplinary approach enhances the book's relevance and appeal to a wide audience, including scholars, activists, and policymakers.

The Book "Empowering Women: Reflections and Trajectories" is a seminal contribution to the discourse on gender empowerment. By examining the complexities of women's lives through varied lenses, the book not only informs but also inspires readers to envision a more inclusive and equitable society. It is a must-read for anyone interested in advancing the cause of women's rights and empowerment.

\*\*\*

***Antarangatil Katha: The Stories Within, Pune: Kashtakari Panchayat, 2023, pages: 242. Price: Not mentioned***

- Cicilia Chettiar

The bilingual hardbound colourful glossy two hundred and forty-one paged book titled *Antarangatil Katha : The Stories Within* begins with an introduction by Poornima Chikarmane. She traces the garbage trail across USA, Paris, Cairo and finally India in the chapter titled *Recycling without Waste Pickers is Garbage*.

The movement started in the USA 1869, moved to Paris 1879, where both groups were celebrated. They went on to be demonized and marginalized as new sanitary regulations came into force. The narrative further traces the journey across Cairo and the Philippines. The narration of chilling stories of the hardships faced by garbage or waste pickers across the globe ends with a gleaming story of social enterprise in Pune that began in 1993 with the establishment of SwaCH.

The story of SWACH in Pune began in 1993 with the establishment of *Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat*, an attempt to organise waste pickers into a union. Securing ID cards for them endorsed by the Pune Municipal Corporation in 1996, saw them gain dignity as human beings and was the first major victory as many of the twenty story tellers will tell us.

The KKPKP with PMC and formed SwaCH, a living entity and a supreme example of a people led movement to find a solution that is decentralized yet contextualized. She describes the commercial format of the association and how multiple stakeholders came together to build a story that gained national and international recognition. The humble waste picker that we see on the streets, whom we choose to ignore and invisibilise, probably has travelled abroad more often than the same people who choose to ignore them.

Each of the following chapters is a narration of the lives of twenty waste pickers through the lens of twenty Pune residents and each one comes away moved, inspired and most of all acutely aware of the reality that the demons we try chase away are within us and not in those who appear different from us.

Story 1: Apsara Tai by Sadhana Dhadich

The story of Apsara tai, is a story of a proud woman. While so many accept domestic abuse in marriage as fate, Apsara Tai chose to walk out with an infant and a young child and just a few rupees. Not knowing history or geography, economics or trade, her growth is the story of an entrepreneur and learned from mentors how to source and market her raw material - in this case, waste. It's a study of a strong woman and also the study of an owner who chose freedom

over safe salaried employment status. The role of creativity in converting labour from work and victim to entrepreneur is depicted through this story.

### Story 2: Medha Kotwal by Sadhana Dhadich

An inspiring story of a of a family facing the future together. A love story, or story of migration from rural to urban, and the support of an organization that provided guidance, protection and an identity, that is the story. The turning points in Medha's life sound just like the turning point of any other woman learning practical economics the hard way to plan for the family's future, and supporting her family through thick and thin, Medha could be any woman. Replace her identity as a waste worker with that of any working mother the narrative remains the same. This raises an important question – turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism as often as men? The question is age-old. Women face all the challenges as any other man, with the added complication of being a "woman" which means the physiological and social events surrounding this gender. Yet women's use of substances is less passive and less reckless than that of men. This story has been repeated across caste and class barriers. Medha Kotwal has presented her as an intelligent and resourceful woman, smiling her way through waste and worry.

### Story 3: Bayda by Rohini Sahani & Kalyan Shankar

This story talks about how education in rural areas was more chance than choice. In the absence of documentation, people relied on native knowledge. Touching one ear with the opposite hand wound around the back of the head indicates a traditional native knowledge that is lost to the scientists of today. It also provides details of recycling at a time when the word hadn't entered the common lexicon. The theme of autonomy because of its entrepreneurial nature is repeated here too highlighting how freedom became more important than dignity. Every growth story starts with someone understanding the larger picture and accepting short-term pain for long-term gain. Bayda's story is no different. She understood the value of KKPKP, was willing to lose a day's earnings and invest in her learning. As a consequence, she represented SWaCH & KKPKP nationally and internationally.



**Story 4: Chitra Kshirsagar by Kiran Moghe**

Drought, migration and the ensuing poverty seem to be common themes for the women in this compilation. From rural agricultural worker to Chitra Maushi the waste picker, the journey was traumatic and included two alcoholic husbands. Although she bore the beatings with fortitude, she refused to accept infidelity and moved on. Feminism, dignity and self-respect are not the privileges of educated and wealthy women only. It is in the lived choices of women from every socio-demographic profile. Owning three homes when most educated people struggle to own one, Chitra Maushi's story hints at an innate intelligence despite the deprivations she faced. Child labour and child marriages, both crimes were addressed by Chitra and her network, even though they faced the wrath of many around them. Insurance, pension, holidays, all normal working professional challenges are shared by Chitra and her companions too. Recognising the value of education and refusing a waste picker's life for her daughters, she asserted her claim to independence by living life on her own terms.

**Story 5: Jayashree Shahabadi by Gitali V M**

Another story of refuse, refusal and SWaCH stepping in as the knight in shining armour is narrated by Gitali V.M. Another tale of how KKPKP and all the associated bodies stepped in to spread some fragrance of hope amongst the piles of stinking garbage. Jayashree Shahabadi has managed to educate her daughter, till her graduation, rides her vehicle and does what she can without being in a leadership position. Praises have been heaped on her by the narrator of the story comparing her light to the shine of gold that has been tempered in the goldsmiths fire, the narrator reminds us how Jayashree Tai exists because of the lifestyles that we possess. We contribute to their existence by the choices we make and if we want to end this inequality and disparity, we must intensify our fight to transform the system.

**Story 6: Kamalbai by Dr. Uday Phadke**

A sixty-year-old woman who was clever enough to know the benefits of being part of a cooperative, whose personal story is almost an echo of the other women, migration, poverty, child marriage, a husband who could never be a

partner and children who had their own share of hardships. Kamalbai managed to get home, medical support and essential dabba when times were tough. The basic needs of food, medicine and shelter have been met with the facilitation the SWaCH team leading to hope for the next generation in her family through education. The greatest gift she could provide for her next of kin was not wealth or resources, but dignity and opportunity. Being recognised as a woman with wisdom by international observers and being given a platform to participate in the cycle of sustainability was a humbling experience for the author of Kamalbai's story.

#### Story 7: Latabai by Sandhya Gokhale

Latabai's early life story is one of happiness, protection and support. Although poverty drove her to waste picking, she felt safe and comforted by her husband and in-laws. Strikingly, while other stories so far include family pictures, this one does not. The author witnessed the resentment and hostility of the children towards their mother. This family has seen only sons and grandsons. And in spite of coming from impoverished backgrounds, Latabai and her daughters-in-law craved daughters. The author's film making background weaves a visual tone in the narrative forcing the reader to see through her lens of cinematic experience.

#### Story 8: Mangal Gaikwad by Joseph Lobo

The academic writing of Joseph Lobo begins with a rhetoric by Rabbi Hillel. The author divides his narrative into two parts based on the reflective query – *If I am not for myself, who is there for me?* This part of the query is answered by the story of fifty-five-year-old Mangal Gaikwad whose childhood was a depiction of abject poverty that flowed into adulthood with rodents, stray dogs and other non-human scavengers for company and competition. The second part of the query – *and if I am for myself alone ... then who am I?* Her rise from member of SWaCH to Trustee in the organization is a measure of her commitment. A family that does not have the traditional scope of settled family life happily married children and healthy grandchildren growing up in love and care is her kingdom that she tries to protect. Unwilling to stop work until the body fails, Mangal's exposure on an international platform and her

evolution from non-entity into respectable personhood has been admirable captured by the writer.

Story 9: Mangal Jadhav by Mini Shrinivasan

It was a simple story written by a Sahitya Academy award winning children's writer about a forty-six-year-old woman who battled poverty and illness and who found safety in the membership of SWaCH. Mangal comes across as dynamic, resourceful, and confident. Pragmatic about how life has to move forward, yet she is determined to ensure a more structured life for herself and her children. Mangal's story is written with simplicity and ease, as would be the natural style for a children's writer and does not carry heavy tones despite references to the hardships in Mangal's life.

Story 10: Mangal Shingare by Madhuri Sahasrabuddhe

Mangal Tai's life as an SWaCH member and an entrepreneur is ably described by another entrepreneur Madhuri who also being the Municipal Councillor has seen the efforts and effects of SWaCH as a grass-roots organisation. At fifty, Mangal is content, satisfied and looks forward to a life of peace with her husband. Ensuring the children have been provided for through education, employment or marriage, Mangal Tai has managed to do justice to her role as an essential services worker for almost two decades. Knowing early in life the pangs of hunger and having been at the receiving end of casteism has not dampened her efforts to live a fruitful existence.

Story 11: Rajabai by Rati Forbes

The story is written in three parts divided chronologically. The first part covers Rajabai's birth and marriage. The second part describes her journey from an isolated waste picker to becoming a member of KKPKP. Part three of the story describes her growth and her leadership. Forbes has shown sincerity and admiration through the words used describe Rajabai's story. She has ensured that the pain and glory are both described in equal detail. Another story of an early marriage, alcoholic husband and young motherhood marks the life of Rajabai.

Story 12: Passport by Vijay Wavare

This is the first story that does not carry the name of the main character as its title. It's also the first story where the writer's own personality and opinions are expressed and not just the admiration, respect and awe for the main character, Ranubai, unlike the other stories so far. There is no detailed biography of Ranubai, instead an attempt has been made to crystallize the core aspect of Ranubai, her belief in proof or evidence of everything. Other than the fact that Ranubai lives with her son and daughter-in-law, there is not much background information provided. The author manages to mention his own life experience and weaves it into the story of Ranubai's life giving us a peek into both their lives.

Story 13: We are not kachrawalas, you are! By Ashish Kothari

Continuing with the same style as story number twelve, the author records the story of Sangeeta David as she reminisces about her life and choices. Here too, the author records his views about society, waste-pickers and other aspects of waste and garbage, he does give quite some detailed information about Sangeeta. He identifies the theme of Sangeeta through her comment that he uses to title the story. People who add to the garbage are the wasters and the people who clear it up are the cleaners. The irony of it is, in Hindi, the labelling is reversed. The author also uses his writing as a form of gratitude expressed to the waste pickers themselves and associations like SWaCH.

Story 14: Our destiny in our hands by Dr. Neelam Gorhe

The story revolves around forty-five-year-old Sarika, and like all the others, she started her waste-picking life as a child, following in her mother's footsteps. Her husband was alcoholic, and she had two children. She started working as a domestic help to make ends meet. Following her husband's death, lack of support from in-laws and no parents to turn to, she started working with SWaCH to ensure her children get a decent upbringing. She wanted her daughter to be educated and take up law. She is currently doing her second year LLB. Sarika sought inspiration and guidance from the ward coordinators and other SWaCH members as she continued her journey towards independence and dignity. This particular story conveys the picture of Sarika painted through the eyes of her coworkers and ward officers.

Story 15: Progressing in life is status by Shubha Gadkari

The author talks about Sarika who married into a family that had a catering business. However, due to unfavourable circumstances, her husband had to resort to working as a ragpicker when they moved away from his family. She was a second-generation ragpicker. Although she tried to escape her lot, life came around in a circle and she had to make the best of her circumstances. Being a part of SWaCH gave them a sense of meaning and protection through the police and other agencies. Through a lot of hard work, she overcame her challenges, and she was always ready to accept any new challenge with a smile. The title of her chapter reflects her belief as she progressed from having nothing to buying her own home. The author's experience as a writer comes across in a simple but succinct narrative that covers key aspects of Sarika's life.

Story 16: The Union Made Us Human by Sanskriti Menon

This story is about Sarutai Waghmare, the President of SWaCH. It's another story of struggle and hope. But more so it is about educating the people of Pune on why and how to segregate their waste. Sarutai and other waste pickers were approached by SNDT Women's University's Adult Education Department in the early nineties to understand their work conditions. Initially, the waste pickers competed to collect scrap, but this effort by SNDT allowed them to connect and discuss their common issues, thus bringing them together. She's been doing this work for more than two decades. She is almost a celebrity because she was featured on Aamir Khan's show *Satyamev Jayate* leading to public recognition in her workspace. She believes that SWaCH has made them human providing them a way to change their lives, for themselves and their family members. She is quite knowledgeable about the importance of the work she does and its impact on the environment, although she has never been to school. Just like the other waste pickers she has ensured her children are educated and have found professions that are not connected to hers. She also owns her home and appears to have built a respectable life for herself. The author concludes with one of the many poems written by the unschooled Sarutai, resonating with revolution and victory.

Story 17: Hats off Sumantai! by Pratima Pardeshi

Sumantai Landge nee More's story is a tale of discrimination at all levels, gender, socio-economic status and caste. Like every other woman interviewed in this book, child marriage, famine, migration, hunger, early motherhood, poverty, are all common themes running through Sumantai's life. She was among the early group of waste pickers who went on to form SWaCH, represented the association at different international fora and built a life of dignity, respect, and status for herself and for other members of the union. Knowing the intricacies of the waste gathering process and the financial hardships faced due to corrupt dealers allowed the union to set up dealers and vendors who would not cheat the waste pickers and in fact give them bonuses of the profits. The sense of being human, the personhood that accompanied a photo identity card, the journey to make this identity card a reality for all members of SWaCH is a story of grit and perseverance of a number of members not just Sumantai. But it is because of the tenacity of women like Sumantai that SWaCH was able to establish its identity and become a successful people's movement.

Story 18: The Story of a mother who studied along with her daughters by Vidya Kulkarni

Vidya Kulkarni the photographer has covered Vaishali's life with one powerful photograph, of her riding a Scooty with a large broom tucked under her arm. Vaishali was a late entrant to SWaCH. Unlike the other stories, Vaishali's is one of a modest but loving family, one where the girls were educated and eventually married at a healthy age. Vaishali continued her education through marriage, motherhood, housekeeping and troublesome in-laws. She tolerated all the troubles that came her way, but when it came to a choice between being the dutiful wife and daughter-in-law versus being the far-sighted mother, she chose the latter. Walking out of her married home with her children, to ensure that her three daughters were not married off early, wanting them to be educated and independent, she chose the path of a waste picker through the SWaCH movement. While many stories of waste pickers are about ending up in the profession because there was no other option, Vaishali's story is different

because she saw the opportunity in the adversity. She has brought up her four children as educated, contributing members of society. It's difficult to comprehend an educated waste picker, that too one zooming off on her two-wheeler across different locations to pick up waste, and yet Vaishali is just that. SWaCH is presented as an organization with integrity and intelligence. Identifying and anticipating the needs of its members, SWaCH has been a blessing to women like Vaishali who in spite of the determination and education may have been lost without the strength of the collective.

Story 19: Vidya's success Story by Vandana Chavan

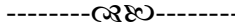
Vidya Anna Naiknavare's story is told by a privileged woman, educated, former mayor, former Rajya Sabha member and yet someone who understands the needs of women across all strata. Her respect and admiration for Vidya's life and achievements are narrated through her emphasis on Vidya's foresight for her daughters, her cheerful spirit and her ability to brighten the room. Vidya's husband is an able support for her dreams and together, with the help of SWaCH, they work hard to make their dreams come true. Vidya, like every other mother, recognised the importance of education for her daughters and ensured both are well educated and flying off into the sunset with their mother's hard work and modern thinking. Vidya's keenness to continue learning, whether it's English or whether it's WhatsApp, indicates her realisation that to learn is to grow and that there is no end to both.

Story 20: Endless journey of turning trash into triumph by Kamla Idgunji

Zahira Aslam Shaikh, at seventy-two, is the seniormost artist in this work of art carried out by twenty residents of Pune and put together by KKPKP. Her story, detailed and elaborate in its telling, describes yet another woman who dealt with poverty, lack of education and alcoholic husband, tortured moments by authorities and residents of Pune themselves, till she became a member of SWaCH. This identity, belongingness, and guidance with respect to rights and liberties allowed Zahira to build a life for her children, her niece and her nephew. She tried her best to provide them with an education and to give them a HeadStart that she could not get. Losing her parents at a very young age, not having a stable home under the care of a grandparent, Zahira still did what

every other woman does, she did all she could for all those who were her family – immediate and extended. Her regret at not educating her children enough due to the hardships they faced do not dampen her pride and gratitude at being able to be a ‘Pratinidhi’ in SWaCH. She repays her debts although old age and ailing health do not allow her to be as active as she was before. But she acknowledges and recognises the role that SWaCH has played for so many like her and how the beneficiaries are marginalised women, self-sufficient homes and the planet at large.

Each story has colourful pictures of the SwaCH member with her family, at work and with the author making the members not just characters of a story but driving home the reality that they are human beings with as much right to life as every other human being on this planet. The book is a testimony to how a group of motivated citizens can bring about revolutionary change at any level. Authorities can be persuaded to be part of a such a social movement and responsible allyship is the key to sustainable communities leading to a healthier planet for all.





## **REPORT**

### **The Changemakers: SuPoshan Sanginis at the SuPoshan Project**

- Kavita Sardana

Investing in the nutrition of children, adolescent girls, and women holds immense potential to transform lives and unlock significant social and economic benefits, particularly in countries like India with high rates of malnutrition. There is a pressing need for collaboration between the government, private sector, donors, foundations, and other stakeholders to prioritize investments in nutrition. The Adani Foundation's SuPoshan Project is a dedicated effort in addressing this need, taking the persistent and stubborn challenge of malnutrition head on.

Health and nutrition are core focus areas of the Adani Foundation, integral to delivering its commitment to empower and enrich the lives of children, women, youth, and marginalized communities across India. Its strategies are integrated in national priorities and global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, the SuPoshan project runs as a community-based initiative, across the length and breadth of the country, spanning 1600 villages and 185 slums, with 90,000 children & 2,18,500 women, aiming to create lasting change from within communities.

Launched in May 2016, the SuPoshan adopts an intensive, firsthand approach with a wide range of interventions over a sustained period. While the project aims are uniform across locations, the needs and available resources are prioritized while developing the implementation strategies. Working in collaboration with various stakeholders and complementing the efforts of the Indian government, the program focuses not only on nutrition but also on reproductive health, women's agency, empowerment, and sanitation.

Central to this effort are the SuPoshan Sanginis, i.e., village level volunteers from within the community, who play a vital role in improving nutrition and health levels in their regions. They focus on the nutrition of children, adolescent girls, and women, helping break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. They lead by example, promoting gender equity at the household and community level.

The Adani Foundation provides training, technology, expertise, incentives, and resource support to SuPoshan Sanginis, empowering them to lead program activities in their communities effectively. Utilizing technology for implementation, monitoring, and feedback, the program employs globally recognized strategies and tools to measure nutritional profiles, counter malnutrition, and improve access to government initiatives.

Resultantly, these Sanginis become resolute advocates, particularly in their role of referring severely malnourished children to hospitals for essential care and treatment. Take for instance Sangini Damyanti's unwavering dedication in promoting timely referrals in Narmada, Gujarat. Her impact is vividly reflected in her remarkable achievement of successfully referring fifty-two severely malnourished children to hospitals, going beyond routine responsibilities. With 200 such Sanginis working in Narmada, 1000+ children were successfully referred to hospitals, ensuring that no child is left behind in the fight against malnutrition. This achievement is not merely quantitative; it is a qualitative shift in community well-being, showcasing the tangible impact of Sanginis in creating a healthier future for the next generation. The success of Sanginis in referring severely malnourished children to hospitals is a testament to the effectiveness of community-centric approaches in addressing complex health challenges. Their on-the-ground efforts bridge the gap between vulnerable children and essential healthcare services, ensuring that prompt intervention can take place to combat malnutrition. Beyond statistics, Sanginis embody a spirit of compassion and initiative-taking engagement that resonates with the core aims of the SuPoshan project.

The social structure in India creates several constraints on women's agency. Gender related challenges significantly affect women's nutritional health throughout their life cycle. Therefore, it is equally important to sensitize men. For example, in the vibrant town of Haldia (West Bengal), 25-year-old Sangini Neeta Singh Bala has pioneered a campaign to sensitize men, fostering a holistic sense of community health and wellness.

Through profound counselling sessions that serve as a bridge between traditional gender roles and contemporary health expectations, she engages directly with men, communicating the pivotal role that they can play in promoting the overall health and well-being of their families. Over three hundred men in the community have undergone transformative counselling. This has translated into tangible improvements in the health status of women during pregnancy, showed by a significant increase in institutional deliveries, sixty deliveries have been institutionalised. Men are now actively ensuring exclusive breastfeeding practices, a crucial aspect of infant health. The emphasis on proper food intake has created a ripple effect, setting up a more holistic environment that encourages open conversations within families about health and well-being. The multidimensional approach includes household interactions, supplying a more personalized touch to the sensitization process. This strategy ensures that the transformative message permeates the very fabric of familial and communal life. Singh's efforts break down barriers and challenge deep-rooted beliefs, fostering a collective understanding of the significance of men's involvement in shaping healthier communities.

The cornerstone of Singh's transformative campaign is the organization of Poshan Shivirs, nutrition camps that have appeared as pivotal forums for altering men's mindsets about their responsibilities towards nutritional status. In a community where literacy levels are lower, particularly among the labour class, Singh's persistent efforts have been instrumental in challenging ingrained feelings. Men are gradually embracing the responsibility for their family's nutrition, leading to tangible changes in dietary choices within households.

The program zeroed in on the problem of child and maternal nutrition which was housed in the complexities of the Indian social/geographical landscape and solved it via activities where women were both the creators of change and recipients of the program benefits.

In the serene landscapes of Narmada, Sangini Indira Ben Vasava, a 38-year-old community leader from Gurudeshwar Block, has been orchestrating a profound transformation through her visionary initiative, Poshan Vatika, or Kitchen Garden. Over the past three years, she has set up 50 Poshan Vatikas across three villages, catering to a population of approximately three thousand people. In the face of water scarcity, animal grazing, she ingeniously used old sarees to demarcate the boundaries of the gardens, highlighting resourcefulness and a dedication to making a positive impact. This not only addressed the challenges, but also contributed to the sustainable use of existing materials, fostering an ethos of environmental consciousness.

The initiative went beyond the physical establishment of the gardens; Sangini Indira Ben Vasava actively imparted knowledge on the reusing of seeds and explained the process of re-sapling. This firsthand approach to education ensured that the communities involved were not only recipients of the initiative but active participants in its sustainability. The emphasis on seed reuse and re-sapling not only minimized costs but also instilled a sense of ownership and self-sufficiency among the beneficiaries.

The impact of Poshan Vatikas extended beyond the cultivation process. Beneficiaries of the initiative actively engaged with the produce, sharing it among themselves. This communal sharing not only addressed nutritional needs but also cultivated a sense of community and camaraderie. The ripple effect of this sharing went beyond the boundaries of the villages, fostering awareness among the wider community, Anganwadi Workers, and various stakeholders.

Crucially, Sangini Indira Ben Vasava's approach promoted the concept of sustainability and proper usage of the produce. The initiative was not merely

about cultivation but about creating a holistic system that encouraged responsible consumption and long-term benefits. The Anganwadi Workers played a pivotal role in propagating this concept, ensuring that the knowledge and practices associated with Poshan Vatikas became ingrained in the community's lifestyle.

At the core of the SuPoshan Project lies a tapestry of compelling narratives woven by SuPoshan Sanginis, the resolute community volunteers driving transformative change. These stories shine a spotlight on the collective strength of these volunteers, portraying them as catalysts for positive transformation within their communities. Their narratives not only highlight personal triumphs over adversity but also underscore their pivotal role in achieving broader community successes in the realm of health and well-being.

Childhood is a precious phase that lays the foundation for an individual's future, shaping their identity and aspirations. However, for many young girls like Amisha in Narmada district, childhood is threatened by the grim reality of child marriages.

Amisha's story mirrors the struggles faced by countless girls in the Vasava tribal community, where societal norms prescribe early marriages. At the tender age of seventeen, Amisha faced the risk of being married off, her dreams truncated by the prevailing biases against girls. Her situation, however, took a positive turn when SuPoshan Sangini Rekhaben Vasava intervened, becoming a catalyst for change.

Armed with the knowledge of the detrimental effects of early marriages on both physical and mental health, Rekhaben advocated for a change in basic assumptions. Her counseling sessions stretched over three months, during which she not only dissuaded Amisha's parents from going ahead with the marriage but also instilled a deeper understanding of the value of education and empowerment. Grateful for the guidance, they not only refrained from marrying Amisha off but also helped her enrol in a beautician course. Today, at 19, Amisha is not only financially independent but is also engaged and

planning her future responsibly. Rekhaben's success has inspired other SuPoshan Sanginis to replicate her efforts. Together, they have successfully thwarted twenty-one child marriages, yet the mission continues. In the intricate tapestry of Narmada's tribal communities, SuPoshan Sanginis appear as champions of change, heralding a brighter future for girls like Amisha and redefining the narrative of empowerment and equality.

These tales unfold as powerful testimonials to the remarkable achievements of ordinary individuals. They redefine the boundaries of what is considered possible, accentuating the transformative influence of determination, community collaboration, and the resilient human spirit. Within each narrative, personal struggles are not merely conquered; they become steppingstones to communal victories.

### **1. Sangini Maya: A Beacon of Transformation in Community Leadership**

Age: 40 | Site: Haldia | State: West Bengal

Sangini Maya's remarkable journey to becoming the Panchayat Mukhya embodies a narrative of profound leadership, marked by unwavering dedication and transformative initiatives that have shaped her community in multiple ways. As a catalyst for positive change, Maya's impact transcends mere administrative duties, as she addresses fundamental issues with a vision that goes beyond the ordinary.

Central to Maya's leadership is her commitment to tackling health and nutrition challenges prevalent in her community. Recognizing the intrinsic link between well-being and development, she has implemented a range of initiatives aimed at improving healthcare access, supplying nutrition education, and emphasizing preventive measures. Maya's efforts have yielded tangible results, enhanced the overall physical health of the villagers, and created a more resilient community capable of withstanding challenges.

Yet, Maya's leadership is not only confined to the realms of health alone. She has appeared as an advocate for collaboration and unity, understanding that

sustainable progress needs a collective effort. Maya's approach is charismatic and inclusive, fostering a sense of community spirit that transcends individual differences. This unity has become a driving force behind the village's progress, as people unite to work towards shared goals and aspirations.

Maya's profound realization, gained through her journey as a Sangini, is that knowledge is the most powerful tool. In her leadership role, she has actively prioritized education, recognizing its transformative potential. Initiatives have been set up to ensure that her community is equipped with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions, breaking free from the chains of ignorance and paving the way for a brighter future.

Maya's leadership has become a beacon of empowerment for her village, propelling them towards progress and prosperity. Her journey reflects the profound impact that a resolute and enlightened leader can have on a community. Through her commitment to health, unity, and knowledge, Sangini Maya has not only changed individual lives but has set her village on a trajectory of positive transformation that will resonate for generations to come. Her story serves as a testament to the enduring power of visionary leadership in fostering meaningful change.

## **2. Breaking Barriers, Nourishing Change: Pooja's Journey as a Trailblazing Sangini**

Age: 24 |Site: Neemuch |State: Madhya Pradesh

Pooja's transformative journey in her village embodies a narrative of profound societal change as she courageously transcended cultural barriers to become a champion of nutritional awareness. Her unwavering dedication not only elevated her status locally but also drew national recognition at a government event, where members of the Panchayati Raj lauded her for breaking free from the restrictive Ghoonghat tradition.

The Ghoonghat, historically symbolic of veiling women, became a formidable barrier that Pooja fearlessly dismantled in her pursuit of advocating for nutritional well-being. Her actions went beyond challenging cultural norms;

they became a symbol of empowerment, symbolizing the breaking of shackles that had confined women for generations. Pooja's commitment to promoting nutritional awareness became a catalyst for societal reflection and transformation.

Her recognition at the government event underscored the significance of her efforts. Panchayati Raj members acknowledged not only Pooja's triumph but also the broader impact of her actions in fostering inclusivity within the community. Pooja's story resonated as an example of resilience and progress, illustrating that positive transformation is possible when individuals challenge entrenched norms and push the boundaries of societal expectations.

Pooja's influence radiates well beyond her own achievements, as she has become an inspiring icon for thirty other Sanginis at the site. Her empowering narrative has motivated these Sanginis to cast aside the Ghoonghat, liberating themselves to work freely. This collective shift is a significant step towards gender equality and inclusivity within the community, sparked by Pooja's trailblazing example.

Pooja's story encapsulates the extraordinary potential for change when individuals, fuelled by determination and a sense of purpose, challenge cultural norms. Her journey serves as an inspiring testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of those who dare to lead the way towards a more inclusive and enlightened society.

### **3. Empowering Birth: Sangini Nita's Initiative for Safe Deliveries**

Age: 38 |Site: Medadraj |State: Gujarat

Sangini Nita's journey unfolds as a poignant narrative of initiative-taking engagement and community-driven impact in the realm of maternal and child health. Her pivotal role began during a routine household survey, where her discerning eyes found a concerning trend – post-birth illnesses in children linked to home deliveries. Undeterred by the enormity of the challenge, Nita decided to take charge, becoming a catalyst for change within her community.



Recognizing the urgency of the issue, Sangini Nita transformed her role from an observer to an advocate. Armed with a deep sense of responsibility and a commitment to the well-being of her community, she started a campaign to raise awareness among pregnant women. Nita, with a compassionate urgency, engaged in conversations with expectant mothers, enlightening them about the potential risks associated with home deliveries and emphasizing the importance of opting for safe institutional deliveries.

However, Nita's efforts extended beyond mere information dissemination. She worked in tandem with local health workers, setting up a collaborative approach to tackle the issue comprehensively. Through a multi-faceted awareness campaign that included one-on-one interactions, group discussions, and community meetings, Nita effectively conveyed the significance of choosing hospitals for deliveries. Her approach was not only informative but also empathetic, addressing the cultural nuances and concerns that influenced birthing practices in the community.

The impact of Sangini Nita's efforts became clear as she successfully mobilized thirty-five women within her vicinity to opt for safe institutional deliveries. This achievement was not just a numerical triumph; it stood for a qualitative shift in behaviour within the community. Nita's initiative not only saved lives but also instilled a collective sense of responsibility for maternal and child health.

Nita's narrative serves as a testament to the transformative power of community-driven initiatives. Her initiative-taking stance and unwavering dedication did not only address a pressing health issue but also fostered a sense of collective responsibility within the community. Sangini Nita's story is an inspiration, illustrating how a single individual's commitment to positive change can lead to a ripple effect, influencing the health and well-being of an entire community. It displays the potential for transformative impact when individuals like Nita take charge, advocating for safer practices and contributing to a healthier future for mothers and newborns alike.

#### **4. Empowering Adolescents: Sangini Geetushri's Impactful Menstrual Health Outreach**

Age of Sangini: 28 |Site: Haldia |State: West Bengal

In the bustling urban slums, Sanginis, trained advocates dedicated to community welfare, are playing a pivotal role in dispelling myths surrounding menstruation and promoting vital health practices. Among these champions is Sangini Geetushri, whose focused efforts have made a tangible impact on adolescent well-being in her community.

Geetushri's advocacy revolves around connecting girls in the urban slums with essential health resources, particularly emphasizing the use of sanitary napkins for personal hygiene during menstruation. In an environment where misinformation and cultural taboos often shroud menstruation, Geetushri's initiative is a significant stride towards breaking down barriers and fostering a healthier understanding of this natural bodily process.

Her approach goes beyond simple information dissemination; it is rooted in building a bridge between the community and health centres. By connecting girls to these centres, Geetushri not only eases access to menstrual hygiene products but also promotes a comprehensive approach to reproductive health. This strategic move ensures that the community has not just information but also the means to implement safe menstrual practices.

Geetushri's impact is measured not just in numbers but in the lives she has touched. Having successfully reached out to seventy girls in her community, she has become a beacon of transformative education in menstrual health. Her training sessions are comprehensive, addressing not only the physical aspects of menstrual hygiene but also debunking prevalent myths and misconceptions.

The significance of Geetushri's work lies in the transformative role of community-based education. By engaging directly with girls in the urban slums, she creates a safe space for discussions, eroding the stigma associated with menstruation. The ripple effect of her efforts extends beyond the

immediate recipients of her training sessions, influencing families and the broader community to adopt healthier attitudes towards menstrual health.

Geetushri's story epitomizes the impact of grassroots initiatives in fostering positive change. Her small steps in dispelling myths and promoting menstrual hygiene have profound implications for adolescent well-being in urban slums. By combining awareness with tangible solutions, Sangini Geetushri exemplifies the transformative power of community-driven education in breaking taboos and creating a healthier, more informed future for the girls in her community.

In conclusion, it is easy to see how SuPoshan Sanginis, now positioned as leaders, have become indispensable guides for the entire community. Their stories of resolve, the resilience that conquers & the triumphs over adversity coupled with the smiles of thousands of women and children reflect the larger transformation.



## **STATEMENT**

### **Solidarity Statement with Palestine Sangat – A South Asian Feminist Network Secretariat 21 October 2023**

Sangat, a feminist network representing women from different countries in South Asia, stands against the genocide that is happening in Gaza. To this day, thousands of innocent civilians have been killed by the aggression carried out by Israeli Occupation Forces.

We acknowledge and share the pain and horror of the families, victims, and hostages of the October 7 violence by Hamas. This action by Palestinian resistance has to be seen in light of the atrocities the citizens of brutally occupied Gaza have been subjected to in all these years. It has been nothing but an open prison with severe restrictions on food, water, livelihood, and mobility. Palestinians in Gaza have been treated as less than humans, totally violating their human rights.

We are alarmed by the support of various heads of state for the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, despite his declared strategy for eradicating and annihilating the Palestinian people through an immoral war.

We are particularly concerned about the genocidal pitched statements from Netanyahu and his lawmakers and the extremely racist and dehumanized language describing the Palestinian people and the ongoing wanton military assault on the people of Gaza.

Palestinians as a people have endured decades of Israeli settler colonial violence. The Israeli state's blockade and siege of Gaza over sixteen years has instituted a system of apartheid, forcing millions to live as refugees in many other countries. The current targeting and bombing of Palestinian civilians, their homes, schools, and hospitals is the culmination of the Zionist strategy to throw Palestinian people out of their own homeland. We stand against the loss

of civilian lives in any conflict, and our sympathies are with the families who are grieving on both sides. We understand the deep shock and trauma of the families, the sentiment to avenge the deaths of their family members and an attack on their community; however, such an onslaught of human suffering and war is not justified. It is unacceptable to engineer another mass exodus of the Palestinian people being driven out of their land once again.

We call for an end to the offensive of the Government of Israel on innocent men, women, and children. We demand an immediate end to what is a humanitarian catastrophe and reiterate that intentional starvation of the civilian population is a crime against humanity, which is being committed against the people of Gaza with total impunity. A humanitarian corridor must be opened immediately, and electricity and water must be reinstated.

We urgently demand that the leaders of nations supporting Israel think carefully about what is unfolding as a genocide. There can be no excuse ever for violence with this intent. Support for it is indicative of a brutal colonial mindset. Revenge is not justice. This siege and assault must stop urgently, and discussions must be initiated for a just solution. We call for the institution of proper mechanisms for accountability and justice to end this culture of immunity and impunity for violations of International Humanitarian Law.

Sangat believes that the feminist struggle for social justice, equality, human rights, and peace includes a people's right to self-determination, and we join our Palestinian sisters, brothers, and allies across the world in condemning the ongoing genocidal war against the Palestinian people and call for an immediate ceasefire by the Israeli Government.



**Khushi Kabir**

Advisor, Sangat- A South Asian Feminist Network

**ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION**  
2253-E, Shadi Khampur, New Ranjit Nagar, New Delhi – 110008

Email: [aidwacec@gmail.com](mailto:aidwacec@gmail.com)

Website: [aidwaonline.org](http://aidwaonline.org)

Date: 29 April, 2024

**AIDWA Demands Strong Action against Prajwal Revanna**

The All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) expresses its anger and disgust against the revelations made about a sitting MP and a candidate in the Lok Sabha poll from Hassan, Karnataka, Prajwal Revanna who is the grandson of H. D. Deve Gowda and leader of the JD(S) which is an ally of the BJP.

The Karnataka Government has filed an FIR against him and constituted an SIT to enquire into the serious accusations of sexual harassment that he faces. There had been talk of his misdemeanours earlier too but he had been given relief by the High Court. In the run-up to his bid for re-election as an NDA candidate, a few days before voting took place on 26th April, pen drives containing thousands of objectionable videos and photographs had started circulating. Some of these had been made by Prajwal Revanna himself to blackmail women into acceding to his sexual demands.

One of these women filed a complaint against him and his father, H. D. Revanna, JD(S) MLA, accusing them of repeated sexual harassment. She is working in their home as a domestic help along with 5 other women. According to her complaint, all of them face this kind of harassment regularly.

The Karnataka Government took action immediately and Prajwal Revanna left the country for Germany on the 28th morning.

Even more shocking revelations are now in the public domain. As far back as December 23, a BJP leader, Devaraje Gowda, had written a letter to the State party President telling him that he 'was in possession of a pen drive containing nearly 3,000 videos' which were extremely obscene. He said that

forming an alliance with the JD(S) and supporting Prajwal Revanna's candidature would be a blow to the party nationally. It is shocking that despite this the BJP whole-heartedly supported his candidature and has not said one word in condemnation of his atrocious, criminal acts.

This is in tune with the support that other sexual offenders in their Party have received from them. It is also extremely disturbing that the National Commission for Women has not intervened in this matter. The mainstream media has also been quite muted.

The AIDWA demands that the Karnataka Government bring Prajwal Revanna back to the State and proceed against him and his father to ensure that they are given the most stringent punishment in the shortest time possible.

Sexual offenders continuing to occupy positions of power and being given tickets to contests by major political parties is a great blow to the struggle for women's right to security. This latest case from Karnataka is one more chapter in this sordid tale.

P. K Sreemathi  
President

Mariam Dhawale  
General Secretary

\*\*\*

**Open Letter to NCW: Act against Prajwal Revanna, HD Revanna  
and any Others Involved in the Horrific Sexual Violence Case**

2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2024

To,  
The Chairperson,  
National Commission for Women, New Delhi

Madam,

We, the undersigned signatories from the All-India Feminist Alliance (ALIFA), Women for Democracy (WFD) and other women's rights collectives across India are writing to you, deeply dismayed at the lack of prompt and strict action by the NCW in the Prajwal Revanna and HD Revanna case. The depth of shame it has caused is not just to the victims of the crimes perpetrated here, but to all citizens of India, and all custodian institutions that are supposed to uphold women's constitutional rights in this country. An open, unconditional and immediate apology is owed to each of the women subjected to the horrendous violence here. The Prime Minister himself should apologize in this case, in fact even though it is not surprising to see his silence yet again after Manipur and many other incidents.

In the past decade, there have been many 'high-profile' cases in which members of the ruling party BJP and its other allies in NDA were accused of sexual violence and the consistent inaction / weak action of the NCW in many of these cases has been telling! The current case seems to be yet another shameful addition to the list and is shocking, both in terms of the scale of abuse and the impunity of the perpetrators. This erodes public confidence in the NCW and the trust of women of the country in such bodies meant for redressal and systemic or structural changes in our institutions and society.

It has come to light that close to 2976 videos of sexual abuse and violence against numerous women, at the hands of Prajwal Revanna have been circulating via pen drives and social media handles. An FIR has also been filed, based on the complaint of an elderly domestic worker alleging Prajwal



Revanna [MP of JD(S), which is an ally of ruling BJP], and his father HD Revanna (MLA) of sexually violating her and her daughter.

We are aware that acting upon complaints of women's rights groups in Karnataka and the letter from the Chairperson of the State Women's Commission, the Chief Minister of Karnataka has announced the constitution of an SIT to investigate this matter and issued summons to both Prajwal Revanna and his father HD Revanna, currently an MLA and a former minister in the state government. Public protests have been reported from different places by outraged citizens. After a major public uproar, NCW had to write to the State DGP, seeking a report within 3 days. However, this action alone is insufficient.

As feminists, women's rights activists and deeply concerned citizens, we demand answers to the following questions:

Ø Why has the response of the custodian of women's rights in the country (NCW) remained so minimal, when a person no less than a Member of Parliament faces grave charges of sexual abuse of and violence against multiple women, that too in an unprecedented manner?

Ø How was Prajwal Revanna allowed to flee the country, without having to face the consequences for his atrocious and criminal unlawful actions, and who facilitated the same?

Ø Why was Prajwal Revanna allowed to contest the Hassan Lok Sabha seat from the NDA, even after his actions of wide-spread sexual abuse were known and communicated through a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2023 by a BJP MLA candidate Mr. Devaraje Gowda, to no less than the Home Minister, Mr. Amit Shah?

Ø By campaigning for a sexual abuser like Mr. Prajwal Revanna and allowing him to contest on an MP seat, what message are the Prime Minister and the Home Minister conveying to the women of India?

If only the NCW had taken timely and stringent action in many previous cases, such incidents would not have happened. We do not hesitate in saying that the NCW has failed the women of this country, by allowing the institution to become an agency for political vendetta and agendas of the ruling party at the Centre. The lack of swift action in numerous cases of violations of women's rights only establishes that the Commission is no longer keen on upholding women's rights as per its mandate in the NCW Act of 1993. We hope that at least now, NCW will live up to its mandate and do the needful.

In the light of the above, we call upon the NCW to immediately:

- Issue Summons to Prajwal Revanna and HD Revanna, to initiate a swift inquiry and proceed to recommend appropriate legal and criminal action against them as per the powers vested in the NCW.
- Recommend cancellation of Prajwal Revanna's diplomatic passport and ensure his return to India immediately.
- Ensure adequate safety, and security to all the women who have faced sexual abuse, who have complained, are likely to complain and are potential witnesses in the case.
- Ensure necessary psychological, medical, financial and legal support to all the survivors of this crime.
- Recommend the disqualification of HD Revanna as an MLA and that Prajwal Revanna should not be allowed to assume charge as MP, even if he is declared a winner, until the charges against him are judicially settled.
- Issue summons to the BJP President to inquire into the information available to the ruling party about the criminal activities of Mr. Prajwal Revanna since December 2023 and why no action was taken by it in this regard, when BJP decided to allow the accused to contest as an MP from BJP-led Alliance of NDA, with the Prime Minister himself campaigning for him.

\*\*\*

## **Citizens Speak Out Against Brutal Cases of Sexual Violence**

**Women Rights Now!**

**Citizens Speak Out Against Brutal Cases of Sexual Violence  
From Kolkata to Manipur, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh...**

**Demand Urgent, Independent and Unbiased Investigations and  
Accountability of Institutional Responsibility!**

**No More Shielding of Perpetrators and Their Protectors**

**Justice to Victims and Their Families!**

**August, 2024**

Amidst distressing news of brutal rape cases coming from multiple states, women's rights groups were joined by mass organisations, trade unions, students' groups, and other civil society organisations to initiate the following statement seeking immediate investigation and action against perpetrators and demanding an end to sexual crimes and gender-based violence.

The heinous rape and murder of a medical practitioner reported from RG Kar Hospital and Medical College, Kolkata, and the cover-up by the institution and authorities are a stark reminder of the callousness of societal attitudes and systemic failures that in fact, perpetuate such violence. Within days of the Kolkata rape and murder, several gruesome cases of sexual violence have been reported from Uttarakhand, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. Each, is a grim reminder that the violence against women and young girls across the country continues undeterred.

It is condemnable that elected representatives, government officials and some political parties are rushing to make political capital out of each case, rather than being invested in the cause of justice or even simply fulfilling their mandated responsibility to ensure the accountable working of the machinery of criminal investigation, law and governance. Far from being concerned prevention of such crimes, governments at the state and the union are resorting to rhetoric – wanting to treat 'rapists as terrorists' or seeking the death penalty without stopping to consider that the rapists at RG Kar weren't deterred by the

hanging of the four men held guilty for the rape and murder of a young woman in Delhi in 2012, or the hanging of Dhananjay Chatterji in 2004... How could they be, when global data has established that the death penalty does not end crimes, it only ends the criminal.

We condemn the actions and inactions of the West Bengal government led by Mamta Banerji for trying to obfuscate the issue as a suicide case and a political conspiracy, ‘transferring’ Sandip Ghosh, Principal of the RG Kar Hospital as Principal of the Calcutta National Medical College Hospital, and only rescinding the order under great public pressure. It also had the temerity to transfer 43 doctors and professors, including some from the RG Kar hospital, in the middle of nationwide protests by healthcare professionals! Against the backdrop of vandalism at the hospital, in which some protesting doctors were also attacked, such actions evidence the state government’s attempts at muzzling those demanding justice and reveal exactly why perpetrators of such heinous crimes feel no pressure or fear of the law.

We urge the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) now investigating the Kolkata case to rise above political interests and conduct a fair and unbiased investigation. However, we recognize that the demand for fair trial and implementation of the law is even more challenging in these times when the Union Government, while making claims of making more stringent laws to ‘protect’ women, systematically releases and even felicitates those held guilty of gang rape, and multiple murders such as those convicted in Bilkis Bano’s case (Gujarat 2002), Muzzaffarnagar (2013), Ariyalur (2016), the Kathua case (2018), or Hathras (2020), Muzzafarpur (2024). This is also the same Union government which stood silent despite widespread evidence of women being brutally assaulted, raped and paraded naked in Manipur. And it is the same central government that assaulted women (and male) wrestlers when they agitated against being molested by the President of the Wrestling Federation of India Chief, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. Not to mention the political support they extend for ‘spiritual leaders’ convicted of sexual crimes such as Asaram Bapu and Gurmeet Ram Rahim to constantly be out on bail.

Let us not forget that the suffering and death of this young woman in Kolkata is only the latest in a series of such terrible incidents, each of them a signpost of the state's dereliction of duty. Laws framed to protect women - in their homes, on the streets, in their workplaces - are flouted with impunity. Mechanisms to monitor the implementation of these laws exist only on paper. It is the state - whether at the Centre or in the states - that creates an enabling climate for sexual violence and ensures that abusers go free.

Such abysmal failure of the state to stand firmly with victims and their families, and rigorously implement the law has created a rampant culture of impunity in which gender-based crimes deeply rooted in oppressive structures of patriarchy, caste, class, capitalism, communalism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism continue unabated. In such a system, women, and gender-based minorities especially those of oppressed castes, religions, class continue to be much more vulnerable to all forms of sexual violence. And the evidence lies in the relentless calendar of cases we hear of every day (and many more we don't). According to the National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB) about 30,000 cases of rape are reported every year – that's an average of about 86 rapes every day, and we have a national conviction rate as low as 27%!

Installing CCTV cameras or calling for the death penalty does not enhance safety or counter systemic impunity. Concealing the facts, silencing whistle-blowers and crushing those who call for justice as we have seen in case after case - can bring neither safety nor justice.

Let us also make the connection between the budget that was passed just a few weeks ago and the horror of this and countless other incidents of sexual violence. How much does this budget allocate to monitoring the implementation of the rape laws, the DV Act, the POSH Act, POCSO, and the SC/ST Act. The Ministry of Women refuses to disclose whether the mechanisms mandated by these laws are in place and functioning as they should be. Does this data even exist?

Today, we stand in solidarity with the victims' families and survivors and demand that action be initiated against perpetrators of these crimes.

We demand a fair trial that deals with sexual violence cases with expertise and empathy.

We hope the intervention of the Supreme Court will help ensure accountability for the institutional failure of elected representatives, police and bureaucracy.

We unite to build a society where women's rights are non-negotiable, and our safety is a fundamental guarantee. The time for that change is now.

TOGETHER, WE CAN...

Break the silence around sexual violence

Challenge institutional, individual and community patriarchy

Stand up for justice and accountability

\*\*\*

## **Letter to National Medical Commission Demanding Public Apology and Accountability**

To,

Hon'ble Minister of Health and Family Welfare

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare,

Room No. 402-D, Nirman Bhawan,

New Delhi - 110011

Date: 07-09-2024

**Subject:** Demand for public apology and taking accountability

Respected Sir,

The recent revisions to the Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME-2024) dated 31.08.24 curriculum by the National Medical Commission (NMC) represent a grievous and unacceptable discrimination in our medical education system. The decision to reclassify sodomy and lesbianism into the category of "unnatural sexual offences" while transvestism (cross-dressing) as a sexual

perversion; fixation on virginity as a marker of purity; exclusion of the mandatory seven hours of disability competencies from the foundation course constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights and legislative standards. Reintroducing such harmful and outdated views into the medical curriculum will directly cause harm to the marginalized citizens of this nation. It jeopardises the safety and mental well-being of countless queer and trans individuals nationwide, fostering further discrimination, harassment, and violence. Medical education must foster an inclusive, non-judgmental approach rooted in scientific accuracy and human respect and dignity.

Even if this change is withdrawn through a subsequent letter on 05.09.24 we still want to share that this entire incident has caused a lot of emotional turmoil in the minds of queer and trans people and persons with disabilities. Specifically queer and trans and disability rights activists are perplexed, and confused and are in demand for an apology from the National Medical Commission (NMC). How can such a change be initiated in the first place that utterly violates the rights of marginalised citizens in the country?

Our community is profoundly aggrieved and outraged by this grossly inappropriate and discriminatory content that perpetuates systemic oppression. This outright ableist, queerphobic, transphobic and archaic CBME 2024 revised curriculum, egregiously contravenes the following pivotal legislations and judgements of India: the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPDA) 2016; The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (TPA) 2019; Mental Healthcare Act, 2017; NALSA vs Union of India 2014; Justice K. S. Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union Of India, 2017; Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India, 2018, Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution (violates freedom of expression). The queer and trans community, disability rights activists and the allies fought a long legal battle to initiate several legal changes mentioned above.

We want to bring to your kind attention that we are deeply disturbed by the continued marginalisation enforced through institutional frameworks that

perpetuate systemic oppression against us. As concerned citizens and staunch advocates for gender-sexually marginalised (GSM) groups and persons with disabilities, we are seething with indignation over this egregious, unscientific, and unconstitutional development that flagrantly violates the laws of our land and demand for an apology and ask the NMC and the union Health minister to take accountability of this situation. To see such stigmatic notions in printed form by the government bodies creates avenues for discrimination and violence to flourish. We also demand for the rightful implementation of the Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India, 2018 judgement and urge the state to take pragmatic actions to alleviate the condition of queer and trans individuals in the country.

The recent decision by the National Medical Commission (NMC) to retract their newly introduced changes within just five days of their announcement starkly underscores the inherent unconstitutionality and illegality of those changes and thereby acknowledging the deep flaws and illegitimacy in their amendment. This incident reveals a broader systemic issue where institutional policies often reflect a lack of genuine consideration for equitable and inclusive practices. This action is a powerful reminder of the need for rigorous scrutiny and accountability in policy-making, and those representing, especially when such policies intersect with issues of gender and sexuality. It also highlights the necessity for ongoing advocacy and vigilance to ensure that regulatory bodies uphold principles of justice, equality and equity.

Let us be mindful of our history that homosexuality was depathologized back in 1973 by the American Psychiatric Association and the World Health Organisation (WHO) removed homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) in 1990. Ending the letter by reinstating our demand for an apology and taking accountability by the NMC.

\*\*\*



## **An Open Letter to CJI on RG Kar Rape and Murder**

To,  
The Chief Justice of India  
Justice DY Chandrachud  
Supreme Court, India

**Subject:** Citizen Petition in the RG Kar Rape and murder case asking for effective legal directives addressing sexual violence and police repression

Dear Sir,

We, as feminist, student, mass organizations and individual citizens from across the country, along with Reclaim the Night, Reclaim the Rights (RTNRTR) Movement in West Bengal are dismayed that even after ‘*suo moto*’ cognizance of the RG Kar rape and murder by the Supreme Court (SC), the case is at a standstill. We want to point out that the SC has failed to address the grievance, anger and rage of common protesting people. A month has gone by but the CBI is yet to reveal any findings of the gruesome rape and murder. In the last hearing, the SC shifted its focus only to the protesting doctors as guilty (endorsed by Mr. Kapil Sibbal) of breakdown of the West Bengal health system. While the citizens and entire medical community, including the senior doctors, are in support of the protesting doctors, whose interest is nothing other than a better accessible public health system, free of corruption rackets and threat culture, the question arises why the honourable CJI is losing focus from fair and transparent investigation on the RG Kar rape and murder. We want the SC to deliberate on the delayed investigations and purported protection of perpetrators, followed by attacks on citizen protests.

We are enraged that politicians, religious organisations and proponents of hate politics are allowed to make violent speeches with impunity. While the judiciary fails to curtail this violence, social activists demanding justice are denied bail and detained in prison for days without trial. The culture of violence has spread so wide and deep that a woman gets sexually assaulted in

broad daylight in a public street in Ujjain, without anyone reaching out to help her. This culture of impunity is alarming for us – *women, queer and trans\** people – who have always struggled for a society free of sexual violence. Unless the judiciary wakes up from its slumber, sexual violence and hate politics will continue to reign and target the most vulnerable sections of society.

The honourable SC had ordered for no restrictions on peaceful protest on the very first day. We are humbly asking what mechanisms the honourable SC may adopt if protesters are threatened and imposed with false cases by police and local goons of political parties. We assure you that this kind of nexus is also active in other states, under your jurisdiction. We want to urgently draw your attention that peaceful protesters, including our friends and comrades, are facing brutal repression by police and local goons. It is ironic that instances of sexual violence and molestation are also being experienced by *women, queer and trans\** people who are independently protesting throughout West Bengal since 14th August, 2024. There are daily reports from various districts of Bengal – where local goons of TMC and BJP attack protesters and disrupt protest sites. Police over-action, attack on peaceful assembly, illegal arrest and filing false cases on protesters is a recent experience in Barasat, North 24 Parganas. The Right to Dissent is integral to democracy.

We expect that the CJI knows, the brutal rape and murder of the trainee doctor at RG Kar hospital is not an isolated incident, but connected to different incidents of sexual violence and gender discrimination at workplace and in the public that have been rapidly increasing throughout the country. In most cases, the ruling parties and their political nexus are behind such crimes. Authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, increasing caste atrocities, poverty and unemployment, syndicate rackets have become the political infrastructure for propelling gender-sexual violence. Even amidst all this tumultuous citizen protests, the political parties are shamelessly scheming how to capture or retain political power.

Just like in Manipur, in Bengal too, a woman was paraded naked in Nandigram by BJP party workers last month, while BJP is acting as the crusader of gender rights, infiltrating and co-opting every citizen protest. A party responsible for cheering and raising the national flag for rapists of Unnao and Kathua; doing forceful cremation, destruction of evidence and shielding dominant caste perpetrators in Hathras; garlanding rapists of Bilkis Bano; and protecting Brij Bhushan Sharan and suppressing voices of Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Mallik and all protesting wrestlers is now trying desperately to hijack feminist movements and peoples' protests. We are determined to expose the patriarchal ploys, caste and communal atrocities underlying the electoral politics of the ruling national party.

We oppose the Aparajita Bill that has been produced by the TMC without any consultation with citizens. As feminists, we are opposed to capital punishment as it is a populist measure to quell public outrage and does not ensure due process for womxn seeking justice. We condemn the carrot and stick policy of the ruling party, trying to appease citizens with measures such as 'Rattir saathi' apps, limiting working hours of women to 12 hours, identifying safe zones with CCTV cameras. To live and breathe freely in society, we want freedom and dignity, not measures that control / surveillance in the name of protection.

Even after 13 years, the PoSH Act implementation has been very poor in workplaces. Rules and procedures of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act post the Verma Committee have not led to the setting up of ICCs within institutions and LCCs at district level. There is no data on Govt. websites about ICC and LCC. Even if they are set up in some places, they are either dysfunctional or headed by higher officials of the administration. It is appalling that the everyday occurrence of gender-sexual violence on working class, Muslims, oppressed caste *womxn*, *queer and trans\** people in the unorganised sector continue to remain unaddressed. The inclusion and involvement of feminist organisations, collectives and platforms in law and policy-making is much required to make the PoSH Act effective in all areas of work.

We raise our concerns regarding the National Task Force (NTF) instituted by SC in RG Kar to review the institutional safety standards - restroom, toilets, hostels, transport, sanitation etc. and address the vulnerability of medical professionals within healthcare institutions.

- a) Institutional safety and infrastructural lack is not only a concern in healthcare institutions but all other educational, public and private institutions need this review and scrutiny.
- b) The appointed committee should have the experience and expertise to discern and address the corruption rackets and systemic failures within medical institutions. The high-profile composition of this proposed committee does not guarantee that political, infrastructural and ethical lapses in medical institutions will be investigated with rigour and skills required.
- c) SC's decision of instituting CISF in RG Kar only amplifies fear, intimidation and surveillance and does not help in speedy investigation.

As historically witnessed, rape and murder is the primary weapon of establishing political power by ruling regimes. The perpetrators in this case have actively tried to cover up the crime, destroyed evidence and spread fear amidst students. The chain of perpetrators from college administration, state administration to the rapists and murderers who are deemed guilty have been receiving full protection of the ruling party. While the CBI investigation have only till now led to arrest of Sandip Ghosh and some of his accomplice, that too only for financial fraud, it is the pressure of the ongoing citizen protests that first, Sandip Ghosh was suspended and now 3 doctors of SSKM and North Bengal University are suspended.

In this context, as the highest authority of the apex court of the country, we place before you the following demands:

1. Identification, arrest and exemplary punishment of the rapists and murderers and accomplices of 9th August. Doctors, students, and health

- professionals are not safe as long as the rapists are roaming free and criminal rackets continue unchecked in medical institutions.
- 2.Immediate arrest of those directly and indirectly linked to evidence destruction.
  - 3.The Supreme Court must change the composition of the NTF and include doctors, students, activists and lawyers from the regional fraternity for effective and informed fact-finding regarding the rape, murder of the trainee doctor and institutional lapses, corruption rackets in the health sector. The NTF needs to consult the protesting doctors, students and women, feminist organizations, platforms who have been working on this issue and are significant stakeholders in this movement.
  - 4.Directive to institute a Special Fast Track Court, along with necessary infrastructure to expedite the trial processes, once the case is transferred to the Sessions Court in Bengal.
  - 5.Issue strict directives to penalise errant police officials, local party workers and anyone who launch physical assault on peaceful protesters and disrupt citizen assemblies in various parts of Bengal.
  - 6.Constitute a Review Committee not only in medical institutions but also in each and every institution, locality in the country to do gender audit to safeguard the overall environment of work. Review Committees in each educational institution can comprise students, teachers and activists, lawyers from feminist, queer movements and organisations. Such Review Committees need to be constituted separately in unorganised sector work.
  - 7.Issue a directive penalising institutions and administrative heads (DM/ Collector) failing to institute ICCs, LCCs as per the provisions of the PoSH Act.

8. Ensure the inclusion of *queer and trans\** people in the PoSH Act and non-discriminatory and equal measures in case of physical, sexual violence on *queer and trans\** persons in the PoSH Act.
9. Revise the newly passed *Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita* (BNS) where registering FIR on sexual assault takes time and one cannot lodge complaint against public servants.

\*\*\*

## **The Pushback on Women's Rights Must be Stopped**

### *Collective Feminist Statement*

A highly distressing pattern is emerging with obstinate coherence in the ongoing debates currently held at several multilateral agencies – a renewed systemic assault on women's agency. Instrumentally celebrated as self-sacrificing family caregivers, dedicated healthcare professionals, or nurturing mothers evocated to fulfil their reproductive function, women find themselves increasingly gated and suffocated within worn-out misleading narratives of health stereotypes that reinforce their assigned roles as vulnerable persons. But women's reality is different: they are, rather, made vulnerable.

The lip service they receive radically clashes with the austerity measures that slash public financial commitments and obligations for their essential functions and other social reproduction work, further exacerbating the exploitation of women and girls who continue to massively perform unpaid labour<sup>1</sup>. This disparity not only undermines women's self-determination and socio-political participation. It also exposes the persevering legacy of a deeper structural injustice demanding our urgent attention, analysis, and daily action.

Following the pandemic and years of revamping global warfare, women's right to express political agency over their own bodies is once again under brutal attack, in several ways. Actual offensives on women's rights and wellbeing are unfolding – and thriving – globally. In Afghanistan women are mercilessly

expelled from the public sphere, while in Iran women's courage has resulted in brutal repressions pursued by religious patriarchy. Meanwhile, in the USA, legal reforms are eradicating the right to abortion, and limiting access to sexual and reproductive health care more generally<sup>2</sup>. In Europe, a directive under discussion risks decriminalising rape and hollowing out the Istanbul Convention. In Gaza and the West Bank, United Nations institutions and Member States still remain paralysed in the wake of a conflict that has to date killed over 35,000 people (as of May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2024<sup>3</sup>) – with women and children representing most of the casualties. The same story, the same doom, as in all armed conflicts.

War is indeed the quintessence of the patriarchal system. Aggression justifies oppression, and abuse becomes the tool of preference for “solving” conflict<sup>4</sup>. These obsessive dynamics make women's bodies the perfect battleground of structural warfare.

Even in the World Health Organization – where officials were found guilty of sexual assaults against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the Covid-19 and survivors paid 250 dollars each<sup>5</sup> – recent calls for gender-responsive reforms and protection of women's rights are again being opposed<sup>6</sup>. Despite the existence of multiple international normative instruments and regional mechanisms that recognize and affirm both<sup>7</sup>, fundamental sexual and reproductive rights continue to face outright challenges.

How is this being justified? Within the WHO, some argue that sexual and reproductive health rights are “political” issues that should be addressed by national governments, as they go beyond the WHO's “technical” mandate. But health is inherently political – a reality the WHO Constitution explicitly acknowledges when it affirms that structural political factors, such as unequal development and discrimination, are impediments to achieving the right to health. The WHO Constitution also acknowledges peace, international cooperation and governments' responsibility for the well-being of their people as essential to health. This conjuncture raises a fundamental question: how

come the political relevance of the WHO causes distress when we're talking about promoting and protecting women's rights, while the same level of discomfort is not detected in other sensitive political matters? Encouraging countries to maintain health spending within their "fiscal envelope" or insisting on the sanctity of intellectual property rights, even if these policies hinder access to essential medicines and seeds, does not arouse the same concerned reactions.

Systematically marginalising and subjugating social groups is an inherently unacceptable sign of power that continues to be imposed. For women and other marginalised communities facing all sorts of injustices, this entrenched power is widely recognized and deeply ingrained – and commonly referred to as patriarchy. Patriarchal models, so deeply embedded in religions and the legacy of institutional structures, are easy to use and widely utilised, to the point of being accepted and interiorized through historical and evergreen exhibits of colonialism, imperialism, and populism. Central to all these manifestations is the suppression of voices, agency, and bodily autonomy.


How women and other minorities continue to be treated today in the multilateral system only reflects such endless patriarchal logic. This is camouflaged with unconvincing rhetoric coupled with minimalist interventions that are aimed to lift the baseline at best. More often than not, though, such initiatives end up reconfirming the status quo of stereotyped societal roles. They do not tackle the roots of direct violence inherent in a system where Member States supposedly speak *for their women* – as if women were possessions!

In the world, women represent the majority. Political institutions at every level have a legal obligation to recognize and honour this reality, rather than undermining it bit by bit. It is imperative for all women to come together and enhance their common struggles to urge governments and multilateral institutions to overcome and dismantle this unsustainable order of things.



## References

1. Dana Abed and Fatimah Kelleher (2022). *The Assault of Austerity: How Prevailing Economic Policy Choices are a Form of Gender-Based Violence*. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/the-assault-of-austerity-how-prevailing-economic-policy-choices-are-a-form-of-g-621448/> [Accessed 13 May 2024].
2. Rachel Easter, Amy Friedrich-Karnik and Megan L. Kavanaugh, (2024), *Any Restrictions on Reproductive Health Care Harm Reproductive Autonomy: Evidence from Four States*.
3. <https://www.gutmacher.org/report/any-restrictions-reproductive-health-care-harm-reproductive-autonomy-evidence-four-states> [Accessed 13 May 2024].
4. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/12/un-chief-urges-immediate-ceasefire-in-gaza-as-35000-palestinians-killed> [Accessed 13 May 2024].
5. Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (2024) *Strongmen and Violence: Interlinkages of anti-feminism and anti-democratic developments*. Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Berlin. <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CFFP-strongmen-and-violence.pdf> [Accessed 13 May 2024].
6. <https://www.voanews.com/a/internal-documents-show-the-world-health-organization-paid-sexual-abuse-victims-in-congo-250-each/7354013.html> [Accessed 13 May 2024].
7. Kerry Cullinan (2024) *Row over Reproductive Rights Group at WHO Executive Board ‘Undermines’ Secretariat and ‘Science-Based’ Approach*. <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/row-over-reproductive-rights-group-at-who-board-undermines-science-based-approach/> [Accessed 13 May 2024].
8. Such: The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly; The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BpFA), agreed upon during the 4th World Conference on women in 1995; The Maputo Protocol Advances African Women's Rights, adopted by the African Union in 2003 and enacted in 2005.

----------

## OBITUARIES

### DR. BHARGAVI DAVAR (1962-2024)

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Dr. Bhargavi Davar, champion of women's rights, mental health activist and a founder of Bapu Trust, who pioneered gender and mental health discourse in India, passed away. Her books titled *Psychoanalysis as a Human Science: Beyond Foundationalism* (1994), *Mental Health of Indian Women: A Feminist Agenda* (1999), *Mental Health from a Gender Perspective* (2001) bear witness to her deep-rooted understanding of philosophy and grounded theory. Her theoretical approach was marked by social justice and mental health perspective. Her articles in *Radical Journal of Health* (2005) and in *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* (2005, 2006, 2012) on mental health ethics had a great ripple effects among social scientists, medicos and feminists. She played a decisive role in drafting of UN Convention of Persons with Disability. In the World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (WNUSP), she stood out with her razor-sharp intellect, extraordinary articulation and inspirational leadership qualities with her clear thinking against coercive practices in psychiatry. She stood consistently for the full and equitable inclusion of users and survivors of psychiatry. She spoke passionately without raising her voice. She motivated her colleagues and mentees to cultivate compassion, discretion and contemplation and seek opportunities to explore alternatives for psychological well-being.



Bhargavi was also a poet, erudite orator and had an electrifying persona. For her 'personal was political' and 'political was personal' and she fought for her political stands with courage of conviction. In the field of mental health, the women's movement saw her as a role model because her intellectual prowess was coupled with compassionate counselling, caregiving and hand-holding of survivors of mental health challenges who

were isolated, stigmatised and vulnerable. During her therapeutic sessions, she would give them reassurance by telling them, “Listen to your heart.”, “Dance to your own beat.” She believed that everything could be learnt. She used art therapy for persons with psycho-social stress to release their inner feelings and generate an environment of hope and inspiration in group therapy.

During 1990s, Dr. Bhargavi worked closely with our organisations CEHAT, Mumbai and Sathi, Pune. She contributes to Radical Journal of Health and Indian Journal of Medical Ethics. In 2002, she invited me to do process documentation of Seher and community-based Mental Health Centre in bustees of Pune. I stayed with the Bapu Trust team for 4 years. My schedule was planned carefully from 7 am to 7 p.m. My meeting before my departure with her kept me spellbound. Her books, articles and chapters in the edited volumes made me confident to start a course on "Counselling for Caregivers" for Sophia centre for Women's Studies and Development, Sophia College in 2002. The course is the most popular and continues till today. Rest in power and peace. You will always be a source of inspiration in the most difficult times in our lives. CANDLE in the Wind.

Two decades back, staying at Bapu Trust Seher Pune for 4 days and going through massive documentation and a rich collection of books on mental health concerns in the Library was a really intense experience for me. Whenever Dr. Bhargavi spoke, I would just get spellbound!! What a command over language!! At the same time, I was tense as she did not smile while conversing. Nonetheless, I used to be in awe of her insights and ability to minutely explain human emotions. Her erudite narration, arguments, and analysis reflected her conviction and sensitivity. She was a visionary institution builder, an intense thinker at the same time empathetic and passionate about her work on mental health concerns. She was sceptical about the biomedical approach to mental health problems, instead, she proactively advocated for community-based mental health care interventions through her theorisation and praxis.

Bhargavi was a genius, always thinking out of the box. She was a trailblazer, detail oriented, at times formidable and an incredible human being; who had a unique approach to mental health, not so easy to understand. Although very serious looking, her invisible warmth and compassion was really touching. Led a principled life and would always tell people around her, “Leave your gentle footprint”. She bravely took stand in challenging biomedical approach to mental health, when others did not. With her commitment, courage of conviction and compassion towards persons with psychosocial disability, she left profound impact on countless lives.

With boundless empathy, she provided institutional support to persons with emotional/psychological disabilities. She consistently fought against coercive psychiatric and biomedical practices. She worked at local, subnational, regional and global levels and greatly impacted the mental health movement fostering inclusivity, healing and capacity building. She was a great teacher, trainer, documentalist, researcher and activist who could transform suffering into strength. She would say, ‘Let us nurture love’, ‘illuminate your world with light. Her pathbreaking legacy will be taken ahead by thousands of practitioners mentored by her through her global network platform, Transforming Communities for Inclusion (TCI), who are striving to humanise the mainstream psychology and psychiatry.

After heart touching tributes offered by mental health activists from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, USA and Scandinavian countries in the online Memorial Meeting for Dr. Bhargavi Davar, the apt verses of **Plum Village Song\*** were recited as a collective tribute to Dr. Bhargavi Davar. Here it goes:

*And when I rise, let me rise  
Like a bird, joyfully.  
And when I fall, let me fall,  
Like a leaf, gracefully, without  
regret.*

*And when I stand, let me stand.  
Like a tree, strong and tall.*

*And when I lie, let me lie,  
Like a lake, reflecting all.  
When I work, let me work,  
Like a bee, wholeheartedly.  
When I play, let me play,  
Like a breeze, refreshingly, light  
and clear.  
When I resist, I will resist,*

*Like the sea, relentlessly.  
And when I speak, I will speak,*

*Like the wind, loud and free.*

Dr. Bhargavi Davar leaves a legacy of love and compassion towards intersectionally vulnerable persons with mental health challenges. Deep condolences to the family-Prabha, Netra, Pramod Kumar Davar and professional colleagues. Rest in peace and power, Dr. Bhargavi Davar!! You will always be remembered by your writings with long lasting impact.

<https://www.protestinharmony.org.uk/songs/and-when-i-rise/>. Accessed on 12-6-2024

\*\*\*

### **TRIBUTE TO KETAKI REGE (12-6-1987 TO 26-2-2024)**

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

Adv. Ketaki Rege left us so soon that void generated in the field of human rights lawyering with special focus on entitlements of the socio-economically deprived and underserved communities facing intersectional marginalities. She was a secular humanist with profound empathy for the working class and the toiling poor. Ketaki's childhood environment was progressive, enlightened and intellectually electrifying. Her growing-up years were marked by debates and discussions on local, national and global socio-political issues taken up by social movements in India. Over and above her legal support to the trade unions fighting their cases in the labour court, her work for the welfare of human development of women and children in Dharavi among the poorest of the poor waste pickers was commendable. Her compassion for the socio-culturally and economically marginalised people manifested in terms of taking a personal interest in their family life and ensuring their children's education, food and nutrition security and health concerns. Through her legal as well as community intervention, she



provided active actual support for workers, queer, Dalit, ethnic-religious minorities. Hence, she was given a title of “Candle in the Wind” by her colleagues and friends. In 2011, she started working with children in the informal settlements in through Dharavi Project, Ketaki. Mother of two lovely daughters Rumi and Mirai, Ketaki had her ‘Chosen Loving Family’ of her life partner, mother, twin sister and feminists. Her life partner, Sudesh shared the same values and shared all the responsibilities of raising twin daughters and later on Ketaki during her illness.

I got to know Ketaki and her twin sister, Keya when the weekly meeting of Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) started taking place at their Arati's home in the early 1980s. Both the sisters would observe us arguing in a volatile manner about how to go about our campaigns, public meetings, conventions, rallies, dharanas and demonstrations. Both of them along with daughters of forum members Aloka, Ruta-Amruta, Odile, Audrey and baby Lara would spend holidays led by Jagdish Parikh and joined by me, to Borivali National Park, Powai Lake Garden, etc. They enjoyed each other's company and were extremely caring towards the youngest of all, Lara.

My close association with Ketaki as a fellow feminist began when she joined the Women's Research and Action Group under Directorship of Vahida. Over last 7 years, we met often and bonded well at our meetings at our home, in our get-to-gathers, at my office at TISS, at Vahida's home and at Ketaki's office. Ketaki's ideological conviction about feminism and movements of the marginalised, kindness, affection towards children, commitment to your twin daughters and quiet determination had won our hearts.

I have known Ketaki as a sensitive and humane labour lawyer. As a fervent labour lawyer, she advocated for women workers’ rights- equal wages, occupational safety, freedom from sexual harassment. She was already Trustee of ACORN Foundation that is doing developmental and community-based work in Dharavi. Ketaki was invited to join Women’s Research and Action Group as a trustee in 2018.

Quiet and polite in her manners, Ketaki was also a feminist who led life on her own terms. Since 2022, Ketaki was valiantly fighting her battle against life threatening cancer. Ketaki's passing has left a profound sadness and her loss is deeply felt by all whose life she had touched. We can keep Ketaki's memory alive by upholding her principles of social and gender justice.

Ketaki will always have a special place in our hearts. *Urdhva Mula* offers heartfelt condolences for the passing of Ketaki after a heroic fight against cancer to her chosen family.

\*\*\*

## **HOMAGE TO DR. MOHINI GIRI**

**21 December, 2023**

With the passing away of Mohini Giri, former chairperson of the National Commission for Women and the founder-president of the Guild of Service, on 20 December 2023, women's organisations have lost one of our most eminent friends and allies in the all-India women's movement. It is not the positions she had held, nor even the Padma Bhushan award she received in 2007, that marks out Mohini Giri as a social activist, but the fierce and active compassion in all her efforts until the very last days of her life towards the deprived and oppressed women, irrespective of caste and religion, of this country.

Born in Lucknow in 1938, Mohini Giri received her education at the University of Lucknow and during her career as an academic established the Women's Studies department at the same University. She was the daughter-in-law of V. V. Giri, the highly-respected leader of the Indian trade union movement who later became the President of India. Her first field-based experiences of the plight of women in India led to the founding of the War Widows Association in 1972 to support women whose lives war had devastated.

Subsequently, in 1979 she became the founder-president of Guild of Service, a Delhi-based organization dedicated to the empowering of widows and providing educational rights for children, the activities of which spread in

different parts of India. At a time in 2000-2001 when the destitute widows attached to various bhajan ashrams in Mathura-Brindavan faced the prospect of being pushed out of Uttar Pradesh by the then state government, her voice in their support provided them with relief and succour. Guild of Service, under her guidance, set up the shelter home Amar Bari (Ma - Dham) in *Brindaban* where she also sought to rescue these women from a life of dependence on religious charity and to provide them with a livelihood which gave them self-respect.

As the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (1995-1998), she put the Commission on the national map with many legal and administrative interventions, her effective networking with the State Women's Commissions in the different states and her assertion of the autonomous status of women's commissions. An extremely persuasive mediator between the women's movement and insensitive bureaucracies, she sometimes went out of her way to ensure that laws and government schemes impinging positively on women's rights got properly implemented; at the same time, she was uncompromising in her basic principle as a social activist, namely that the interest of the most deprived women in our society should be maintained above all things.

Even after her tenure as Chairperson ended, she always remained a vocal critic of any attempt to curb the autonomy of women's commissions and initiated many efforts at an all-India level to amend the law on the National Commission for Women to give it the status it deserved in a democratic country. We remember these efforts especially at a time when most women's commissions, national or state-based, are being turned into meaningless figureheads merely serving the interest of the political party in power.

We recall with affection and pride the many occasions when the Guild of Service, led by her, joined forces with other national women's organizations to raise their voices against growing attacks on women's rights even in recent years. We pay our heartfelt respects to her memory which will always remain with us as a shining example.

ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (AIDWA)



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN WOMEN (NFIW)  
ALL INDIA PROGRESSIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (AIPWA)  
ALL INDIA MAHILA SANSKRITIK SANGHATAN (AIMSS)  
ALL INDIA COORDINATION POW-PMS-IJM

\*\*\*

**TRIBUTE TO PROF. SUMA CHITNIS (1933-2024)**

- Prof. Vibhuti Patel

During 1980s and 1990s, Prof. Suma Chitnis always had her enigmatic presence in seminars, workshops, conferences and academic meetings. I got to work closely during 1090-1992 when she introduced Diary for every student, a foundation course on Women in Changing India, Cultural programme for the



SNDT Women's University employees and passed an order that made me Director (I/C) of the Research Centre for Women's Studies and I was hesitant as I was just 35 years old. She took the initiative and convinced me to accept a post-doctoral fellowship from the Commonwealth to work at the London School of Economics. She changed the format of the conventional

beauty contest of SNDTWU to TALENT CONTEST and gave it an appropriate name, MISS TEJASWINI. As a young academic, I was highly impressed by her intellectual endowment, refined sense of humour and forthright attitude in professional life. While working at the Sophia Centre for Women's Studies and Development, Sophia College, Mumbai in 2002, we approached Prof. Chitnis to join as a Consultant and she readily agreed. A chance meeting at the airport in the pre-pandemic period when I saw her sitting in a wheelchair. When I greeted her, she smiled and told me that she was happy that I had joined the unit established by her (now known as the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies supported by the University Grants Commission). Rest in peace and power, Prof. Suma Chitnis. You were looked after so well in

the loving and caring company of your 2 generations of family members. You have left amazing memories of secular humanism and building institutions and individuals!!

\*\*\*

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Dr. Ashwinder Kaur**, a visiting faculty, Anwar Jamal Kidwai Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India

**Dr. Chitra Sinha** is an academic, author and Gender Studies expert, presently based in Bahrain

**Dr. Cicilia Chettiar** is Associate Professor of Department of Psychology of Maniben Nanavati Women's College, Mumbai.

**Dr Kanchana Goudar**, School of Humanities, St Francis de Sales College Autonomous - 560100

**Dr. Manaswini Dwibedi** is Research Scholar in English Literature, English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad

**Dr. Padmini Jain**, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism and New Media Studies, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi.  
[padminijain@ignou.ac.in](mailto:padminijain@ignou.ac.in)

**Ms. Shriya Bhatia** is pursuing M.A. in Economics, Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, India.

**Dr. Subhamitra Adhikari** Assistant Professor, Schools of Interdisciplinary Science, Symbiosis Skills and Professional University; Research Scholar Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

**Dr Swati Partani**, Asst Professor/ HOD, Department of Child Development, Maniben Nanavati Women's College, Mumbai

**Dr. Vaishali Ojha**, Assistant Professor, Department of Finance, KES Shroff College of Arts and Commerce, Mumbai

**Prof. Dr. Vibhuti Patel** is an Academic Advisor, Irene Heredia Sophia Centre for Women's studies and Development, Sophia College, Mumbai.

**Kavita Sardana** is an Advisor, Nutritionist. SuPoshan, Adani Foundation, Ahmedabad

## **GUIDELINES TO THE CONTRIBUTORS**

*Urdhva Mula* is an interdisciplinary journal (ISSN No. 2277-7954) that publishes articles based on multidisciplinary research, as well as essays about diverse aspects of gender and women's issues. Gender functions as a central category of analysis. The journal concentrates on gendered representation of topics from the fields of literature and language, history, political science, sociology, anthropology, cinema and media studies, human development, law, and medicine. It also analyses the intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, location, nationality and disability.

*Urdhva Mula* is accessible widely and it seeks to incorporate an international vision, including book reviews related to women's studies and gender studies. It will be particularly useful for researchers on gender issues. Professionals, academics and students from other fields, whose experience might not be limited to gender issues but who are interested in the topic, will also find this journal a valuable resource.

Contributions to *Urdhva Mula* must report original work, and will be peer-reviewed. Manuscript preparation guidelines:

- Papers are accepted only in English. Manuscript to be submitted as Word documents file. (Font: Times New Roman. The title should be in font size 16, sub-titles in font size 14, and main text in font size 11.)
- Format and referencing should follow the APA guidelines.
- The title with the author's name, with brief intro, must be on a separate page, and the author's name should not feature anywhere else in the article, so that the peer-review process may be impartial.
- Articles should be 5000-7000 words in length. Papers that greatly exceed this will be critically reviewed with respect to length.
- Articles may express the personal voice of creative writing, or a reflection on a transforming text or event in the field of gender, or an impersonal presentation of data useful to researchers in that field.
- A short biographical note about the author must be supplied on a separate page.
- Authors whose work has been accepted for publication will receive a complimentary copy of the issue containing their article.



**LIST OF PUBLICATIONS OF  
SOPHIA IRENE HEREDIA CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES  
& DEVELOPMENT**

**Working Paper Series:**

- 1.1 Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace
- 1.2 Endometriosis: A Pilot Study
- 1.3 Survey on Food and Nutrition
- 1.4 Understanding Menopause
- 1.5 A Study of the Cognitive and Attitudinal Impact an AIDS Awareness of Educational Intervention on College Students

**Research Paper Series:**

- 2.1 Stress and Health Implications of Domestic Violence
- 2.2 Women and Environment: Bangles of Fire
- 2.3 Women and Environment: Women in Panchayat
- 2.4 Women and Environment: Misrepresentation of Women in Advertising

**Book:**

Trivedi, Rajshree (Ed.) *Interrogating Patriarchy: Essay on Contemporary Women Poets of India*. ISBN 978-93-88332-24-8

**Handbook:**

Anil, Deepti, and Pujari, Lata (Com. and Ed.) *Gender Champion Handbook*. Mumbai: Sophia College for Women, 2024

**Urdhva Mula: An Interdisciplinary Peer-reviewed Annual Journal on Women's/ Gender Studies**





**Sophia Irene Heredia Centre for Women's Studies and Development,  
Sophia College (AUTONOMOUS),  
Bhulabhai Desai Road,  
Mumbai-400026, INDIA**