

The Flip Side

Media reporting through gender lens



Celebrate Her Life

An Initiative by Population First

Edited by: Dr. A. L. Sharada

Supported by



Norwegian Embassy
New Delhi

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FOREWORD



DR. A. L. SHARADA

Director, Population First

The last two years were quite exhausting and challenging for all of us. Working closely with the media in the pandemic times made us realize that they were the real unsung frontline workers. We were prepared for a very lukewarm response to our call for entries because of the challenges being faced by the media

persons during the Covid-19 times. However, we are very happy with the response we received and the range of topics and depth that they represented.

It is always a pleasure to read the entries, we get new insights, understand issues better and feel excited that good journalism is alive and kicking. I thank all the winners who have given their permission to feature their article in this compilation of award-winning entries of the 11th edition of *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity 2021. Titled *The Flip Side – Media reporting Through Gender Lens*, the book helps the readers realize that it is the choice of the Journalists and content creator to focus on those themes and issues which are generally not pursued in the media and give the readers a peek into the unknown and unexplored aspects of social reality of gender and patriarchy.

The book is divided into seven thematic sections viz., From Insights to Action: Issues during the pandemic, Reporting on Gender-based Violence & Discrimination, Policies, Programs & Practises: Decoded, Pride & Beyond: The LGBTQ+ Community, Women's Health & Hygiene, Cyber Crimes & Online Sexual Harassment, Breaking Barriers: Women empowerment. The insightful section intros and the featured articles will help all those who wish to enhance their journalistic skills.

I congratulate the Chrysalis team for editing and designing the book. My special thanks to Suprina Sandhu, Himangi Verma, Manasi Diwan, Trupti Rao, Astitva Kanduri, Rishabh Choudhary and Sridarshana Mukherji for their meticulous editing, eye for detail and the insightful intros.

I am thankful to team *Laadli*, particularly Pooja Nagdev for coordinating with the winners for the content and with the Chrysalis team to ensure that we meet the deadlines at our end.

This book was made possible by the funding support we received from United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and The Royal Norwegian Embassy in India. A big thank you to them.

The writings reflect the commitment and hard work put in by the journalists. Many of the stories had a positive impact with the government agencies, the police and the judiciary responding to the stories and initiating action to mend the situation or provide succour to the survivors of violence. The stories make riveting reading and expose the various dimensions of gender inequality and violence that prevail in the country.

MESSAGE FROM UNFPA

MR. SRIRAM HARIDASS

Representative India and
Country Director Bhutan a.i
United Nations Population Fund
New Delhi



It gives me immense pleasure to convey my warm congratulations and best wishes to Population First on marking 11 successful years of important contribution in engaging with the media to mainstream gender and challenge deeply ingrained stereotypes.



UNFPA partnered with Population First to mainstream gender in media through their *Laadli* campaign. Mainstreaming gender in the media is not just about devoting space for issues concerning women and girls but about making sure that all gender identities are equally represented. It is also about viewing every story from the standpoint of its impact on men, women and persons with alternate gender identities, whether these are routine stories around health, education, safety, the world of business, representation in politics or stories specific to issues like climate change, disasters and pandemics.

The *Laadli* campaign has been working for over a decade to bring about transformative change in the way media and communications portray diverse gender identities. I am very happy that the award-winning entries of the eleventh edition are being compiled into a book. The stories that won awards this year, are not just fascinating but raise

critical questions around discrimination and violence faced by vulnerable individuals like the transgender community and sex workers during the pandemic; there are stories that talk of the need for more eco-friendly and sustainable solutions to menstrual hygiene; stories bringing out newer forms of violence like online sexual harassment and cyber-bullying; stories about the resurgence of harmful practices during the pandemic. These stories have helped bring to the forefront the hardships of the marginalized and vulnerable.

I hope the compilation would provoke thought and inspire young journalists to include gender conversations and discussions around social inclusion in their communication, thus changing narratives and debates around gender.

I would like to conclude my remarks by thanking the Royal Norwegian Embassy in India for their consistent support for working with the media for enhancing the value of women and girls.

Thank You.

THE JURY SPEAKS

“Reading the entries made me realise how much of a yeoman’s service the *Laadli* Awards do. They put the focus firmly on writings that highlight women’s issues, issues of gender, of violence, various issues read about, we hear about but put them on the back burner.” - **Kiran Manral - An author, TEDx speaker, columnist and mentor, journalist, researcher, festival curator, and entrepreneur.**

“All these steps that *Laadli* is taking in acknowledging and rewarding will go a long way in getting more and more creative minds to be more conscious of creating advertising that addresses some of the gender stereotypical issues that we deal with in everyday life. More power to *Laadli* Media Awards and more power to our creative industry so that it may sit up and see how it can make a difference and make society at large a more balanced society.” - **Megha Tata - President, International Advertising Association (IAA), Managing Director, Discovery Communications India**

“It is an award with a difference, they not only run for a cause, but they even espouse the cause. The winners are not only excellent in the work that they do, but they are making a difference in the world and making it a better place. Such awards need to be hailed and need to be encouraged.” - **Ramesh Narayan - Author and Founder, Canco Advertising Pvt. Ltd.**

LAADLI MEDIA & ADVERTISING AWARDS FOR GENDER SENSITIVITY 2021

The Flip Side: Media reporting through the gender lens covers a collection of award-winning entries in ten languages. The articles focus on gender inequalities and discrimination under different thematic areas. This compilation is a compelling commentary on the persistence of disparities throughout society that shows how tough the fight for equality is – and may continue to be as everyone collectively works to change the contours of our gendered political, social and economic landscapes. From issues faced during the pandemic to LGBTQ+ rights, from discussing policies and programs to women fighting against odds, the articles cover a large canvas of issues.

Media plays a key role in exposing the injustices and inequalities, exposing the lacunae and gaps in the efforts to address the same through policies and programmes, and creating public opinion on important issues. This collection of articles reveals shocking ground realities of gender inequality, delving with steadfastness and integrity into women's lives at home, the workplace, the public sphere, and much more.

SCOPE OF *LAADLI* MEDIA AWARDS

- Cover 28 States, 8 Union Territories
- 13 languages

MEDIA

Advertising: Print, TV, OOH, Radio, Digital and Direct Mail

Print: Newspaper & Magazine News Features

Electronic: TV and Radio

Web:

Other Media:

Special Awards:

CATEGORIES

Product, Service, Brand, Public Service Announcement, and CSR.

Articles, Features, Investigative Reports, Editorials, Op-Eds and Columns.

News Features, Features, Documentaries, Topical Programmes and Issue Based Programmes Radio Play, Community Radio, University Radio, Jingles.

E-magazines, News Features, Features, Articles, Blogs, Columns, Special Editions, Social Media Campaigns and Podcasts.

Theatre, Feature Films, Documentary, Books, Most Inspiring Woman Protagonist In A TV Serial.

Laadli Of The Century Award, *Laadli* Lifetime Achievement Award, *Laadli* Gender Champion Award, *Laadli* 'Woman Behind The Screen Award'.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH

The role of the media in disseminating information is vital. However, it is not limited to being an information provider but also shapes public opinion, personal beliefs, and even people's self-perception. Health communication links the domains of communication and health and is critical in improving women's health, public health policies and programmes. Lack of health information and education impede achieving better health outcomes.

Even though the right to health is a fundamental right (adopted in the Constitution of WHO), many women are denied it because of the discrimination caused by various sociocultural factors. Additionally, unequal power equations between men and women, poverty, lack of education, and gendered restrictions further prevent women from benefiting from quality health services. This section has several writings which explore the various facets of women's health.

Though menstruation is a natural process that women go through every month, only a small percentage of women in India have access to clean menstrual hygiene products. Moreover, culturally, a significant portion of the population still associates the menstrual cycle with impurity and shame. The article, 'Tribal women in Malkangiri come together to debunk menstrual taboo' by Arunika Mohapatra features a group of 25 young tribal women in the Malkangiri district who have taken it upon themselves to create awareness about menstrual hygiene. The volunteers have successfully covered 5,000 girls in 25 residential schools of Malkangiri district since July last year.

The web article with the translated title, 'The silence over periods and sportswomen in India' by Vandana Dhand, on the other hand, features sports women sharing their training experiences during their periods and the challenges they face in talking about it.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his Independence Day speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort, brought up the taboo topic of sanitary pads and referred to the 'Re 1 Sanitary Pad' scheme. While this bold move by the Prime Minister brought a smile to the women, this Hindi article, 'जन औषधि केंद्र: वार्डों के साथ घोटाला' by Priyam Verma brings forward the realities of the availability of sanitary napkins at various Jan Aushadhi outlets.

Akshay Nema, in his article, 'महिलाओं में धीरे से बढ़ रहा सर्वाइकल कैंसर', highlights the increasing incidence of cervical cancer, even at the district level. In addition, the article educates the readers on how it is caused and identifies what women need to do to detect it early. Jyoti Shinoli, in her article, 'My kaat [uterus] keeps coming out', shares the chilling stories of Bhil women with prolapsed uteruses who cannot access medical facilities in Maharashtra's Nandurbar district.

The rarely discussed subject of men's role in family planning is explored in the article, 'दिल्ली में आधा फीसदी पुरुष भी नहीं कराते नसबंदी, परिवार नियोजन में नगण्य है भागीदारी', by Parikshit Nirbhay. He brings forward shocking statistics of the abysmally low number of men opting for vasectomy compared to the number of women undergoing tubectomy.

The insensitivity of the system towards pregnant women working in government organizations is exposed in the article, 'मातृत्व अवकाश पर गयी और अशक्त महिलाओं की भी लग गयी चुनाव में झूटी', by Shreya Sharma & Priti Singh. They highlight how the government has imposed election duty on hundreds of women, including pregnant and disabled women. The authors express their anguish that neither the school authorities nor the election commission is sensitive to the problem of women on maternity leave being given election duties.

ASHA workers are the first point of contact for women seeking government health services. Not only do women depend on them for medication but also for guidance and share their day to day health struggles with them. Anna Keerthy George, in her video, 'A Day With An ASHA worker'

takes us through the routine of ASHA workers, who have been pivotal in Kerala's battle against Covid-19.

One in two women faces domestic violence in India, which impacts their physical and mental wellbeing in many ways. Unfortunately, the internalized misogyny makes many of them accept and justify the violence and hold themselves or their failures responsible for the violent behaviour. An article by Feminism in India under their campaign 'Ab Bolna hoga' entitled, 'स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम : शोषण से पीड़ित महिलाएं मदद क्यों नहीं मांगती?' dwells on how victims of domestic violence experience Stockholm syndrome and feel that they are victims on account of some fault of theirs. The article focuses on ways to identify women with this syndrome and change their mindsets.

PRINT & WEB MEDIA

MALKANGIRI COME TOGETHER TO DEBUNK MENSTRUAL TABOO

Arunika Mohapatra

26 November 2020, The Times of India

BHUBANESWAR: With mothers and older women shying away from talking about puberty and menstruation, and most importantly, lacking proper knowledge about it, the right messages about health and hygiene have failed to reach most adolescent girls. In the wake of this, a group of 25 young tribal women in Malkangiri district have come up with a solution. They have taken it upon themselves to create awareness about menstrual hygiene in the tribal-dominated district and would meet all expenses of the campaign from their own pocket.

Calling their group Bada Didi, these women from Paraja, Koya, Bhumia, Kui Kandha and Bonda (a particularly vulnerable tribal group) started their journey in July 2019. After taking permission from the district administration, they went to the girls' hostels of sevashram schools and spread the message through videos, slide shows, close interactions as well as one-on-one discussions.



The administration twice facilitated their training, which was conducted by the UNFPA and resource persons. “We had to visit each school twice to break the ice and often communicated with the girls in their language for familiarity. We shared our phone numbers so that they can reach out to us whenever required,” Jayanti Buruda, one of the volunteers from the Koya tribe, said.

Being tribals themselves, the volunteers are well-aware of their tribal traditions and practices. “Menstruating tribal girls are lodged in separate huts and come home at night to sleep on the verandah. They are not allowed to meet the male members during this period. They assume that it’s impure blood coming out of the body,” Deeparani Nayak, a volunteer belonging to the Paraja tribe, said. So far, the group has covered Malkangiri, Maithili, Khairput and Korukonda blocks. Besides, they have conducted programmes in the Bonda Hills and three panchayats — Gajalmamudi, Jadamba and Ralegada in the cut-off area or Swabimaan Anchal in Chitrakonda block. “Hygiene is another big issue. The girls mostly use clothes that are neither properly washed nor sun-dried for disinfection. In some parts like the cut-off area, sunlight doesn’t reach the ground as it is heavily forested. Being shy, the girls usually hide their menstrual cloth under other clothes to dry them. This increases the chances of infection,” Radhika Majhi, a volunteer from the Bhumia tribe, said.

The volunteers have taught the girls about cleanliness during menstruation, the use of sanitary pads and their proper disposal. “The lack of proper hygiene during menstruation can result in vaginal infection. It can cause fever, white discharge and pain. In a more serious form, it can block the fallopian tube creating problems in pregnancy later in life,” Surya Narayan Das, retired professor of gynaecology and obstetrics at SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack, said.

As schools were shut after the outbreak of Covid-19, the girls connected with the sarpanches and ASHA workers and visited 17 villages to raise awareness. “Teenage girls easily share their pain with the volunteers who are from their own community. In the pre-Covid times, the volunteers worked on the weekends as children did not have school and could devote more time to these workshops. The volunteers have not yet received any funds from the administration,” Rajashekhar Reddy, aspirational district fellow, ministry of home affairs, said.

Reddy added the administration has approached funding agencies to help the volunteers and was also planning to set up a cloth pad-making unit in Malkangiri district. The volunteers also teach the teenage girls about “Good Touch and Bad Touch” as being ignorant the girls often become pregnant, complicating their lives.

Bada Didi volunteers have already covered 5,000 girls in 25 residential schools of Malkangiri district since July last year, official sources said. The campaign is important as according to the 2011 census, Malkangiri has 3,09, 568 female population with more than 50% being tribals. It has a low female literacy rate of 38% and lack of awareness among tribes has led to unsafe and unhealthy menstrual practices.

Bada Didi volunteers connect with girls at Goudguda village in tribal-dominated Malkangiri district recently.



Arunika Mohapatra is currently working as an Assistant Editor in The Times of India, an organisation she joined as a Senior Copy Editor in 2007. In her over 23-year-journey as a journalist, she has worked in The Indian Express and OTV after passing out of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in 1998.

जन औषधि केंद्र: वादों के साथ घोटाला, नैपकिन सिर्फ महंगा वाला

प्रियम वर्मा

21 दिसंबर 2020, दैनिक जागरण

अभियान: स्वच्छ रहें, स्वस्थ रहें (तीसरी किस्त)

टैबू बन चुके एक विषय पर इस स्वतंत्रता दिवस पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने बात करके इसे रुढ़िवादी पहरे से मुक्त कराया। सेनेटरी नैपकिन पर चर्चा की और महिला स्वास्थ्य के साथ सशक्तिकरण की ओर पहला कदम बढ़ाया। उन्होंने कहा कि महिलाओं की सेहत को ध्यान में रखकर (प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र) योजना के तहत एक रुपये में सेनेटरी नैपकिन उपलब्ध करवाना शुरू किया गया है और महिलाओं तक 6,000 जन औषधि केंद्रों से पांच करोड़ से अधिक संख्या में पहुंचाया गया है। प्रधानमंत्री का यह कदम महिला सेहत के चेहरे पर मुस्कान तो लाया लेकिन जन औषधि केंद्रों की वर्तमान स्थिति ने उसे ठेंगा दिखाया। प्रमुख राज्यों की राजधानी के पॉश एरिया के केंद्रों में या तो नैपकिन था नहीं या फिर आम नैपकिन के दाम पर उपलब्ध था। किसी ने कहा कि दवाओं का पर्याप्त स्टॉक ही नहीं तो नैपकिन क्या रखेंगे तो किसी ने कहा कि महंगी चाहिए तो ले लो नहीं तो बाजार के थोड़ा कम में दे देंगे।

दिल्ली: ऑर्डर डाला है, जाने कब तक आएगा

देश की राजधानी के हरिनगर स्थित प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र पर नैपकिन बोलते ही कहा कि जो भी स्टॉक है, खत्म हो चुका है। ऑर्डर डाला है देखिए कब तक आता है। बिक्री को लेकर कहते हैं कि इतने कम आते हैं कि हफ्ते भर के अंदर ही खत्म हो जाते हैं। वहीं गुरुग्राम में सिर्फ एक जन औषधि केंद्र था जो पर स्थायी तौर पर बंद का बोर्ड टंगा था। इसके अलावा नोएडा में सदरपुर रोड स्थित प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र पर संचालक ने नैपकिन का नाम सुनते ही अरुचि दिखाई। बोले स्टॉक लंबे समय से नहीं है और पता भी नहीं कि कब तक आएगा।

कोलकाता: सिर्फ महंगा वाला ही है

शहर के राम मंदिर इलाके स्थित जन औषधि केंद्र में सिर्फ महंगे वाले सेनेटरी नैपकिन बिकते हैं। कहते हैं कि ये भी सरकारी है बस चार की जगह पंद्रह वाला है। दोनों में ही चार पीस होते हैं, बस क्वालिटी में अंतर होता है। ज्यादा लेंगी तो थोड़ा सस्ते में दे देंगे।

लखनऊ: हफ्ते भर भी नहीं रुकता माल
अभियान: स्वच्छ रहें, स्वस्थ रहें (तीसरी किस्त)

टैबू बन चुके एक विषय पर इस स्वतंत्रता दिवस पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने बात करके इसे रुढ़िवादी पहरे से मुक्त कराया। सेनेटरी नैपकिन पर चर्चा की और महिला स्वास्थ्य के साथ सशक्तिकरण की ओर पहला कदम बढ़ाया। उन्होंने कहा कि महिलाओं की सेहत को ध्यान में रखकर (प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र) योजना के तहत एक रुपये में सेनेटरी नैपकिन उपलब्ध करवाना शुरू किया गया है और महिलाओं तक 6,000 जन औषधि केंद्रों से पांच करोड़ से अधिक संख्या में पहुंचाया गया है। प्रधानमंत्री का यह कदम महिला सेहत के चेहरे पर मुस्कान तो लाया लेकिन जन औषधि केंद्रों की वर्तमान स्थिति ने उसे ठेंगा दिखाया। प्रमुख राज्यों की राजधानी के पॉश एरिया के केंद्रों में या तो नैपकिन था नहीं या फिर आम नैपकिन के दाम पर उपलब्ध था। किसी ने कहा कि दवाओं का पर्याप्त स्टॉक ही नहीं तो नैपकिन क्या रखेंगे तो किसी ने कहा कि महंगी चाहिए तो ले लो नहीं तो बाजार के थोड़ा कम में दे देंगे।

दिल्ली: ऑर्डर डाला है, जाने कब तक आएगा

देश की राजधानी के हरिनगर स्थित प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र पर नैपकिन बोलते ही कहा कि जो भी स्टॉक है, खत्म हो चुका है। ऑर्डर डाला है देखिए कब तक आता है। बिक्री को लेकर कहते हैं कि इतने कम आते हैं कि हफ्ते भर के अंदर ही खत्म हो जाते हैं। वहीं गुरुग्राम में सिर्फ एक जन औषधि केंद्र था जो पर स्थायी तौर पर बंद का बोर्ड टंगा था। इसके अलावा नोएडा में सदरपुर रोड स्थित प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र पर संचालक ने नैपकिन का नाम सुनते ही अरुचि दिखाई। बोले स्टॉक लंबे समय से नहीं है और पता भी नहीं कि कब तक आएगा।

कोलकाता: सिर्फ महंगा वाला ही है

शहर के राम मंदिर इलाके स्थित जन औषधि केंद्र में सिर्फ महंगे वाले सेनेटरी नैपकिन बिकते हैं। कहते हैं कि ये भी सरकारी है बस चार की जगह पंद्रह वाला है। दोनों में ही चार पीस होते हैं, बस क्वालिटी में अंतर होता है। ज्यादा लेंगी तो थोड़ा सस्ते में दे देंगे।

लखनऊ: हफ्ते भर भी नहीं रुकता माल

शहर के राजाजीपुरम के जन औषधि केंद्र संचालक से सेनेटरी नैपकिन पूछते ही कम स्टॉक की पीड़ा छलक पड़ी। कहते हैं, मैडम जब नैपकिन आता है तो हफ्ते भर में माल खत्म हो जाता

है। ज्यादा से ज्यादा 500 पीस आते हैं। लोगों की नजर पड़ती है तो 50 से लेकर 100 तक डिमांड करते हैं। हालांकि उन्हें दस पीस से ज्यादा नहीं दिया जाता।

पटना: सब ठीक ठाक घर के ही आते हैं

शहर के पॉश इलाके में स्थित इस प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र के संचालक बताते हैं कि ठीक ठाक बिक्री होती है। प्रतिष्ठित लोग ही आते हैं। नैपकिन की उपलब्धता पर कहते हैं कि सेनेटरी नैपकिन का स्टॉक उपलब्ध नहीं है। कम ही आता है और आते ही तुरंत बिक जाता है। महिलाएं कम आती हैं और ग्रामीण लोग तो आते ही नहीं।

जम्मू: हाइटेक लोग सस्ता कहां इस्तेमाल करेंगे

सेनेटरी नैपकिन पूछते ही श्रीनगर के प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र संचालक के जैसे मन की बात पूछ ली हो। कहते हैं कि हां स्टॉक है, बहुत सारा है। बताते हैं कि दुकानों पर आने वाले लोगों को सेनेटरी नैपकिन इस्तेमाल करने को लेकर कहा भी जाता है लेकिन वो लोग...सस्ता है तो बेकार होगा, समझकर खरीदते ही नहीं।

लुधियाना: इकट्ठा भी दे देते हैं

लुधियाना के एक जन औषधि केंद्र के संचालक का कहना है कि लोग ज्यादा नहीं खरीदते। स्टॉक काफी दिन चल जाता है इसलिए वो ग्रामीण या निम्न आय वर्ग के लोगों का इंतजार नहीं करते बल्कि इकट्ठा माल भी सप्लाई कर देते हैं।

रांची: ज्यादातर समाजसेवी संगठन खरीदते हैं

शहर के कांके स्थित प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र के संचालक का कहना है कि जागरूकता की कमी है इसलिए आम लोग नहीं खरीदते हैं। ज्यादातर समाजसेवी संगठन ही बांटने के लिए लेते हैं। क्वालिटी में भी फर्क है। आम नैपकिन की तुलना में यह छोटा होता है।

इंदौर: लॉकडाउन से किल्लत है

इंदौर के प्रधानमंत्री जन औषधि केंद्र के संचालक के मुताबिक वहां सात आठ महीने से सेनेटरी नैपकिन नहीं है। दिल्ली से स्टॉक आता है, महीनों लग जाता है। लॉकडाउन में लोगों को इससे काफी परेशानी भी हुई।

सस्ते दामों पर दवा उपलब्ध कराने के लिए प्रधानमंत्री भारतीय जन औषधि परियोजना नवंबर 2008 में लॉन्च की गई। इसके बाद 2018 में (जनऔषधि सुविधा ऑक्सो-बायोडिग्रेडेबल सेनेटरी नैपकिन) की घोषणा की गई। प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी की सस्ती और गुणवत्तापूर्ण स्वास्थ्य सेवा की दृष्टि को सुनिश्चित करने के लिए केंद्रीय फार्मास्युटिकल विभाग द्वारा यह कदम उठाया गया। ये सेनेटरी नैपकिन पर्यावरण के लिए हानिकारक नहीं हैं क्योंकि ये पैड ऑक्सो-बायोडिग्रेडेबल सामग्री के साथ बनाए जाते हैं और परीक्षण एएसटीएम डी-6954 (बायोडिग्रेडेबिलिटी टेस्ट) के बाद मानकों के भी अनुकूल हैं। फिर 27 अगस्त 2019 को केंद्रों पर बिकने वाली सेनेटरी नैपकिन की कीमत घटाकर एक रुपये कर दी गई। देश के 734 में से 732 जिलों में यह सुविधा उपलब्ध है और 12 अक्टूबर 2020 तक 6634 केंद्र कार्यरत थे।

(A series of 10 articles was selected for the award. This is one of them)



Priyam Verma is a Postgraduate in journalism and has been a Chief Reporter in Dainik Jagran since 2017. Her earlier experience was with Zee News with the Special Investigation Team, Electronic Media Monitoring Center (EMMC is under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) Hindustan Media Ventures Limited.

महिलाओं में धीरे से बढ़ रहा सर्वाइकल कैंसर

अक्षय नेमा

11 नवंबर 2020, देशबन्धु

जिले में दो वर्षों में 73 महिलाओं की हुए स्क्रीनिंग जिनमें से 2 पॉज़िटिव होशंगाबाद। देश भर में महिलाओं में स्तन कैंसर के बाद सबसे ज्यादा होने वाला कैंसर सर्वाइकल कैंसर बन गया है। यह गर्भाशय के निचले हिस्से गर्भाशय की ग्रीवा पर होता है। सर्वाइकल कैंसर के मरीजों की संख्या अब जिले में भी सामने आने लगी है। यह महिलाओं में होने वाला दूसरा व सबसे ज्यादा होने वाला खतरनाक कैंसर है। खतरनाक इसलिए है क्योंकि इस कैंसर के शुरुआती लक्षण नहीं होते हैं। जिससे इसकी पहचान करना मुश्किल होता है। 5 से 10 साल बाद जब लक्षण आते हैं, तो बहुत देर हो चुकी होती है। इसलिए इसे पहचान पाना जरूरी हो जाता है। जिला अस्पताल की महिला रोग विशेषज्ञ डॉ.संध्या नेमा बताती है कि महिलाओं को इसका अंदाजा ही नहीं हो पाता है कि उन्हें कैंसर है। क्योंकि इसमें बहुत ही धीरे धीरे लक्षण आते हैं। इसलिए स्वास्थ्य विभाग 30 से 60 साल की उम्र वाली सभी महिलाओं को कम से कम 1 बार सर्विक्स की जांच करने सलाह देता है। यह जांच हर 5 साल में होनी चाहिए ताकि कोई प्रारंभिक लक्षण हो तो पहचान हो सके। यह कैंसर पूरी तरह से ठीक हो सकता है। लेकिन इसकी समय रहते पहचान व इलाज शुरू होना जरूरी है।

जिले में चल रहा प्रोग्राम-

नॉन कम्प्यूनिकेवल डिसीज (एनसीडी) के अंतर्गत यह प्रोग्राम नेशनल हेल्थ मिशन द्वारा संचालित किया जा रहा है। वर्ष 2019 जुलाई महीने से जिला अस्पताल में महिलाओं की स्क्रीनिंग और जांच शुरू हुई थी। जुलाई 2019 से अक्टूबर 2020 तक केवल 2 महिलाओं में सर्वाइकल कैंसर पॉज़िटिव मिला है। जिनका इलाज भोपाल एम्स में चल रहा है। बताया जाता है कि इनमें से एक महिला की मृत्यु हो चुकी है।

क्या है सर्वाइकल कैंसर-

गर्भाशय ग्रीवा का कैंसर विकासशील देशों में महिलाओं को होने वाला दूसरा सबसे आम कैंसर है। सर्विक्स गर्भाशय बेलनाकार मुख होता है जो गर्भाशय के निचले हिस्से को योनि से जोड़ता है। जब कैंसर सर्विक्स की कोशिकाओं को प्रभावित करता है तो इसे सर्वाइकल कैंसर कहते हैं।

वर्ष 2019 में जिला अस्पताल में हुई स्क्रीनिंग और पॉज़िटिव केस-			
महीना	स्क्रीनिंग	पॉज़िटिव	
जुलाई	18	0	
अगस्त	5	0	
सितंबर	2	0	
अक्टूबर	3	0	
नवंबर	5	0	
दिसंबर	6	0	
वर्ष 2020 में जिला अस्पताल में हुई स्क्रीनिंग और पॉज़िटिव केस-			
महीना	स्क्रीनिंग	पॉज़िटिव	
जनवरी	0	0	
फरवरी	3	0	
मार्च	6	1	
अप्रैल	0	0	
मई	0	0	
जून	0	0	
जुलाई	0	0	
अगस्त	0	0	
सितंबर	16	1	
अक्टूबर	9	0	



Akshay Nema has been working in journalism for the past eight years. He is currently associated with Deshbandhu Hoshangabad as District Bureau Officer. He is also the recipient of the Punarnava Award of MP Hindi Sahitya Sammelan of 2017 for his satirical works.

MY KAAT [UTERUS] KEEPS COMING OUT

Jyoti Shinoli

17 June 2020, ruralindiaonline.org

Bhil women with a prolapsed uterus cannot access medical facilities in Maharashtra's Nandurbar district. They struggle with no road or mobile connectivity, unrelenting hard labour and excruciating pain.

Pallavi Gavit, five months pregnant, had been writhing in pain on khat (charpoy) for over three hours. Her sister-in-law Sapna Garel, 45, was with her when Pallavi's uterus slipped out of her vagina, a five-month-old male foetus lifeless inside. In unbearable pain, blood and secretions dripping onto the floor, Pallavi fell unconscious.

It was 3 a.m. on July 25, 2019. The rain was hammering down on Pallavi's thatched hut in Henglapaani, a hamlet of 55 Bhil families is in the Satpuda hills. In this inaccessible part of Nandurbar district in northwestern Maharashtra, there are no pucca roads, no mobile networks. "Emergencies don't come by invitation. They can occur anytime," says Pallavi's husband Girish (all names have been changed in this story). "Without network coverage, how can we even call an ambulance or doctor?"

"I was terrified," 30-year-old Girish continues. "I didn't want her to die." At 4 a.m., in the dark and in pelting rain, Girish and a neighbour carried Pallavi on a makeshift bamboo-and-bedsheet stretcher up the slushy Satpuda hills towards Dhadgaon, 105 kilometres away.

Henglapaani hamlet is in the Toranmal gram panchayat region of Akrani taluka. The Toranmal rural hospital would have been closer, but that road was not safe that night. Barefoot (the wet mud makes it difficult to wear slippers), Girish and his neighbour struggled to get a grip on the muddy pathways. Pallavi, covered with a plastic sheet, was moaning in pain.

They climbed uphill for nearly three hours until they reached the Toranmal Ghat road. "It is around 30 kilometres uphill," says Girish. From there, they paid Rs. 1,000 to hire a jeep that drove them towards Dhadgaon village. After five hours on the road, Pallavi was admitted to a private

nursing home in Dhadgaon – the rural hospital there was a further 10 kilometres away. “I took her to the very first dawakhana [health facility] I saw. It was expensive, but at least they saved my Pallavi,” he says. The doctor charged them Rs. 3,000 and discharged her the next day. “He said she could have died from the heavy bleeding,” Girish recalls.

Months later, Pallavi still experiences daily discomfort and pain. “My kaat [uterus] keeps coming out from my yoni [vagina] whenever I lift a heavy utensil or bend down,” she says. Pallavi is 23 and has a one-year-old daughter, Khushi. She was born at home, safely, with the help of an accredited social health activist (ASHA) from Henglapaani hamlet. But her untreated uterine prolapse makes it difficult for her to take care of the baby.

“I have to bathe Khushi, feed her, lift her several times a day, play with her,” Pallavi tells me. “With a lot of physical activity, sometimes I have a burning sensation in my stomach, pain in the chest, and difficulty sitting and getting up.”

While Girish takes their two cows out to graze, it is Pallavi who must fetch water every day from the stream down the hill. “It is two kilometres downhill. But that is the only source of water for us,” she says. By April-May even that source dries up, forcing Pallavi and the other women in the hamlet to climb further down in search of water.

She and Girish cultivate maize and jowar on two acres during the monsoons. The yield on these steep slopes is poor, Girish says. “We get four or five quintals [400-500 kilograms], of which I sell 1-2 quintals to grocery stores in Toranmal at Rs. 15 per kilo.” When the annual harvest is done, Girish migrates to Navsari district in neighbouring Gujarat to find work on sugarcane farms. He manages to earn a daily wage of Rs. 250 for roughly 150 days a year.

With all the work at home and on the farm, Pallavi is left with no energy to trek to the nearest primary health centre (PHC) in Japi village, around 35 kilometres away – though she often has a fever, feels dizzy and even falls unconscious. The ASHA worker, she says, gives her some medicines. “I want to go to the doctor, but how? I am very weak,” she adds. Walking that distance through the hills with her prolapsed uterus is almost impossible for her.

Toranmal gram panchayat's population of 20,000 (as estimated by a gram panchayat member) is spread over 14 villages and 60 hamlets. They are served by one PHC in Japi, six sub-centres, and one 30-bed rural hospital in Toranmal June (Old) village that provides contraceptive care like condoms, oral pills, sterilisation procedures and insertion of IUDs, as well as prenatal and antenatal services. But because the hamlets are in remote locations in this difficult terrain, most of the women have home-based childbirths.

"The number of obstructed labour cases in Toranmal is high because tribals here live on the top of hills, climbing up and down several times a day for water, even during pregnancy. This causes complications and premature childbirth," says a doctor from the Japi PHC, who does not want to be named. The PHC, staffed with two doctors, two nurses and one ward assistant, was set up as recently as 2016, and sees only four to five patients a day. "People come only when the situation gets really bad or when the bhagat's [traditional healer] treatment fails," he says.

Between April 2019 and March 2020, the doctor saw five cases of uterine prolapse. "All of them needed 100 per cent surgical intervention. So we referred them to the Nandurbar civil hospital. There is no facility to treat such chronic obstetrics cases here," he says.

Uterine prolapse occurs when the pelvic floor muscles and ligaments stretch or weaken, and are no longer able to support the uterus.

"The uterus is a muscular structure that is held in place inside the pelvis with various muscles, tissue and ligaments," explains Dr Komal Chavan, Mumbai-based chairperson of the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India. "Because of pregnancy, multiple childbirth, prolonged labour or mishandling [of delivery], in some women, these muscles weaken, causing prolapsed uterus." Severe cases may require reconstruction surgery to repair the weakened pelvic floor tissues, or a hysterectomy (surgical removal of female reproductive organs), depending on the age of the woman and the severity of the problem.

A 2006-07 study of chronic obstetric morbidities (COM) among rural women in Nashik district, Maharashtra, published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research in 2015, found that of the 136 women reporting COM, genital prolapse was the most prevalent (62 per cent). In addition

to advancing age and obesity, “obstetric factors such as high parity and deliveries conducted by traditional birth attendants were significantly associated with the occurrence of prolapse,” the report notes.

The Nandurbar civil hospital, where Pallavi could get free surgical treatment for her uterine prolapse, is nearly 150 kilometres away from Henglapaani, her hamlet. Getting there would mean that three-hour climb uphill and then a four-hour bus journey. “When I sit I feel I am sitting on something and it hurts,” Pallavi says. “I cannot sit in one place for long.” The state transport bus on this route makes a single trip at around 1 p.m. from Toranmal. “Can’t doctors come here?” she asks.

With no road connectivity, patients in Toranmal have no access even to the mobile medical units that provide healthcare at the doorstep in remote regions, the doctor notes. In Akrani block, 31 villages and many more hamlets are not connected by road. The Maharashtra government’s Navsanjivani Yojana provides for mobile medical units in inaccessible areas with one medical officer and one trained nurse, and two such units are functional in Akrani taluka, according to the Maharashtra Tribal Development Department’s Annual Tribal Component Schemes report for 2018-19, but they cannot reach hamlets like Pallavi’s.

The Japi PHC itself has “no electricity, no water, and no accommodation for the staff,” the doctor there says. “I have written many letters to the health department regarding this, but there is no progress.” The health workers find it impossible to travel to Japi from Nandurbar every day. “So we work here on weekdays, spending the night at an ASHA worker’s house. We return to our homes in Nandurbar on the weekend,” the doctor adds.

This makes the role of the ASHA workers in the area even more crucial. But they too struggle with limited stocks of medicines and kits. “We don’t get a regular supply of iron and folic acid tablets for pregnant women or disposable delivery kits with mask, gloves and scissors,” says Vidya Naik (name changed), ASHA facilitator from Henglapaani, who supervises the work of 10 ASHAs in 10 hamlets.

Some ASHA workers are trained to conduct deliveries, but not complicated ones. Vidya records two to three infant mortalities and one or two maternal deaths every month that result from unsafe home deliveries.

“We don’t need anything else – just give us a safe road to travel for safe deliveries,” she says.

“Along with antenatal care for early intervention, qualified gynaecologists are especially important in difficult geographical terrains, where women’s daily duties are even more challenging,” Dr. Chavan adds.

However, the Government of India’s Rural Health Statistics 2018-19 record that of 1,456 specialists required at community health centres in Maharashtra – four at each centre, including a surgeon, gynaecologist, physician and paediatrician – only 485 were in position by March 31, 2019, leaving a shortfall of 971 or 67 per cent.

The National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4, 2015-16) notes that only 26.5 percent of mothers in rural Nandurbar received full antenatal care, only 52.5 per cent had institutional deliveries, and only 10.4 per cent of those who had home deliveries were assisted by skilled health personnel.

Nandurbar district, with a large Adivasi population – predominantly Bhil and Pawra – is at the lowest rank in the Maharashtra Human Development Index 2012, grappling with malnourishment and poor infant and maternal health

Around 40 kilometres from Pallavi’s house is Legapaani hamlet, on another hilltop inside the Toranmal forest. There, in her dark thatched hut, Sarika Wasave (not her real name) was boiling palash (*Butea monosperma*) flowers in water. “My daughter has a fever. I will bathe her with this. She will feel better,” says 30-year-old Sarika, who belongs to the Bhil community. She is six months pregnant and finds it difficult to sit for long in front of the stone chulha (stove). “My eyes burn. And it hurts in there [pointing to her groin]. My back also hurts,” she says.

Fatigued and weak, Sarika also has a prolapsed uterus. But she is forced to continue doing all the daily chores. Every time she urinates or pushes a little hard during bowel movements, her uterus descends and protrudes from her vagina. “I push it back with the corner of my saree; it hurts,” she says, breathing heavily and wiping the sweat off her face. She turns her face aside as a gust of smoke from the chulha hits her.

She has been suffering from a prolapsed uterus for three years. In 2015, when she was eight months pregnant, she had sudden labour pains at 1 a.m. Her mother-in-law performed the delivery and after six hours of labour, Sarika's uterus had slipped out of her vagina. "I felt as if someone had dragged a part of me out," she recalls.

"An untreated uterine prolapse can lead to further complications such as urinary infection, bleeding upon friction, infection and pain – all leading to discomfort in daily movements," says Dr. Chavan. The condition can worsen with advancing age, she adds.

Women with any degree of prolapsed uterus are told to avoid lifting heavy weights, and advised a high-fibre, nutritious diet with plenty of water to avoid constipation. But Sarika has to struggle to get even one full meal a day and a pot of water. Pregnant or not, she must walk eight kilometres downhill to the hand pump every day to collect water. The steep climb back is slow and even more difficult. "The friction of the kaat with my thighs causes burning. Sometimes it bleeds," she tells me. As soon as she gets home, she pushes the prolapsed part in.

In addition to the physical suffering, there are social and economic consequences to this condition. A prolapsed uterus can affect a marital relationship, leading to abandonment or rejection by the husband, as has happened with Sarika.

Sarika's husband Sanjay (name changed) married again after she suffered the prolapse. Sanjay works at hotels in Dhadgaon, earning Rs. 300 a day for four to five days of work a month. "He spends his income on his second wife and son," Sarika says. He barely ever works in the fields. So Sarika herself cultivated one quintal of maize on their two-acre farm during the 2019 monsoon. "My husband took 50 kilograms for his second wife and child and the rest I ground for bhakri ."

With no source of income, often Sarika depends on the ASHA worker and some villagers to give her rice and dal. Sometimes, she borrows money. "I have to return the 800 rupees a villager loaned me in June [2019] to buy rations and seeds," she says.

And sometimes her husband beats her and forces her to have sex. "He doesn't like my condition [prolapsed uterus]. That's why he married again.

But he comes when he is drunk. I cry with pain [during intercourse], but then he beats me," she says.

The day I meet her, a pot of cooked rice is kept beside the chulha . This is the day's only meal for herself and her five-year-old daughter Karuna. "Only around one kilo of rice is left at home," she says. That is all that remains of the three kilos of rice and eight kilos of wheat she got on her BPL ration card. Her three goats are the only additional source of nutrition. "I get a glass of milk every day from one goat," she says. That milk too she divides equally between her daughter and her four-year-old stepson Sudhir, who lives two kilometres away with his mother.

The rural hospital in Toranmal is 15 kilometres from Sarika's hut and the sub-health centre is five kilometres away. It's a steep climb. The shared jeep service is infrequent, forcing her to walk the distance. "I can't walk much. I get breathless very quickly," she says. During her antenatal visits at the sub-centre, she too was detected with sickle cell disease, an inherited blood disorder that affects haemoglobin and causes anaemia. Toranmal rural hospital, built-in 2016, has 30 beds. The daily outpatient department sees 30 to 50 patients, says medical officer Dr Suhas Patil. They come with minor ailments such as fever, colds or physical injury. Only one or two patients come for deliveries every month from some 25 surrounding villages. The hospital has two medical officers, seven nurses, one laboratory (but no technician), and one lab assistant. There is no position for an obstetrician and gynaecologist, or any other specialist to treat serious cases like Sarika's.

"We don't get cases of a prolapsed uterus. Most of the cases present pelvic bleeding and sickle cell anaemia. Even if we do get such cases, we don't have the facility or the expertise to treat them," says Dr Patil, who has been working at the hospital since 2016, and stays at the hospital's staff quarters.

Even if they did have the facility and expertise, Sarika may not have told the doctor about her prolapsed uterus. "It is a babpya [male] doctor. How can I tell him that my kaat is falling out?" she asks.



Jyoti Shinoli is a Mumbai-based bilingual reporter who writes in Marathi and English. She works full-time with the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), where she joined in September 2017. Jyoti began working as a journalist in 2014 with Marathi television channels such as Mi Marathi and Maharashtra TV.

दिल्ली में आधा फीसदी पुरुष भी नहीं कराते नसबंदी, परिवार नियोजन में नगण्य है भागीदारी

परीक्षित निर्भय

22 फरवरी 2020, अमर उजाला

पुरुषों को पछाड़ रहीं महिलाएं, सरकार बढ़ा सकती है प्रोत्साहन राशि, मध्यप्रदेश सरकार के आदेश से हुआ था सियासी हंगामा।

मध्यप्रदेश में परिवार नियोजन कार्यक्रम में कर्मचारियों के लिए 5 से 10 पुरुषों की नसबंदी कराना अनिवार्य किया गया, हालांकि सियासी हंगामा होने के बाद राज्य सरकार को आदेश वापस लेना पड़ा। हालांकि इससे नसबंदी का असल मुद्दा वहीं रह गया। दिल्ली में नसबंदी लंबे समय से ज्वलंत मुद्दा है। विशेषज्ञों का मानना है कि बढ़ती आबादी के नियंत्रण पर अब ठोस फैसले लेने का है। फिर चाहे अनिवार्यता या अन्य कोई? इसे महज राजनैतिक परिदृश्य से देखना उचित नहीं।

सरकारी आंकड़ों के अनुसार दिल्ली की आबादी का कुछ ही फीसदी हिस्सा सरकारी अस्पतालों में सालाना नसबंदी कराने पहुंच रहा है लेकिन इससे भी ज्यादा गंभीर यह है कि दिल्ली में 0.5 फीसदी पुरुष भी नसबंदी नहीं कराते। यहां पुरुषों की नसबंदी का आंकड़ा 0.20 फीसदी है। करीब 35 से 40 महिलाओं पर महज एक पुरुष ही नसबंदी कराने अस्पताल जा रहा है। दिल्ली के परिवार कल्याण नियोजन विभाग का ही मानना है कि परिवार नियोजन में पुरुषों की सहभागिता न के बराबर है। ये हाल तब है जब हर साल करोड़ों रुपये परिवार नियोजन जागरूकता कार्यक्रम व अभियान इत्यादि पर खर्च किए जा रहे हैं।

आंकड़ों के अनुसार साल 2008 में 25890 महिलाएं, 5655 पुरुषों ने नसबंदी कराई थी जबकि वर्ष 2018 में करीब 700 पुरुष और 18 हजार से ज्यादा महिलाओं ने नसबंदी कराई। यह हाल तब है जब दिल्ली सरकार नसबंदी के लिए पुरुषों को 1100 रुपये देती है। वहीं सामान्य वर्ग की महिलाओं को सिर्फ 250 रुपये तो अनुसूचित जाति व अनुसूचित जनजाति की महिलाओं को 600 रुपये दिए जाते हैं।

स्वास्थ्य विभाग के एक वरिष्ठ अधिकारी का कहना है कि जनसंख्या नियंत्रण में पुरुषों की सहभागिता बढ़ाने के लिए सरकार की ओर से प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं। जल्द ही पुरुषों को मिलने वाली प्रोत्साहन राशि में भी बदलाव किया जाएगा। हालांकि इसके लिए स्वास्थ्य कर्मचारियों पर अनिवार्यता को लेकर असहमति जताई है। इनका कहना है कि नसबंदी को लेकर किसी को किसी भी प्रकार के बंधन में बांधना गलत होगा।

आरएमएल अस्पताल ही में साल 2018 में 2 पुरुषों ने नसबंदी कराई जबकि 2019 में यह आंकड़ा बढ़कर 8 हुआ। फिलहाल इस साल में दो पुरुष अब तक नसबंदी करा चुके हैं। परिवार नियोजन विभाग की डॉ. अनीता वर्मा ने कहा कि यह हमारे सामने बड़ी चुनौती है कि पुरुष नसबंदी के लिए आगे आएंगे। इसके लिए हमने पुरुष काउंसलर भी रखे हैं। पिछले सालों में पुरुष नसबंदी की संख्या अस्पताल में बढ़ी है। नसबंदी के बाद न तो पुरुषों में कोई कमजोरी आती है और न ही उन्हें नपुंसकता का शिकार होना पड़ता है।

दुनिया के बाकी हिस्सों से लेना चाहिए सबक

सफदरजंग अस्पताल के डॉ. मनीष का कहना है कि जनसंख्या का तेजी से बढ़ना भारत को सामाजिक, आर्थिक दोनों ही क्षेत्रों में पछाड़ रहा है। नसबंदी पर जागरूकता की बेहद कमी है। वहीं सरकारी स्वास्थ्य तंत्र भी इसे लेकर बहुत चुस्त नहीं है। खासतौर पर पुरुषों की नसबंदी को लेकर फैली सामाजिक भ्रांतियों का दुष्प्रभाव पूरे देश में है। इसके पीछे के कारणों पर भी विचार जरूरी है। लोकनायक अस्पताल के डॉ. विनोद का कहना है कि धार्मिक व राजनैतिक विचारों से ऊपर उठकर सरकार को विदेशों की भांति ठोस निर्णय लेने चाहिए। उन्होंने कहा कि हमें दुनिया के बाकी हिस्सों से भी सबक लेना चाहिए।

2018 में केवल दो पुरुषों ने कराई नसबंदी

नपुंसकता के डर के कारण पुरुष नसबंदी के लिए आगे नहीं आते जबकि ये महज भ्रांति से बढ़कर कुछ नहीं है। बृहस्पतिवार को नई दिल्ली स्थित आरएमएल अस्पताल में आयोजित कार्यक्रम में डॉक्टरों के अनुसार पुरुषों में नसबंदी को लेकर जागरूकता मंद गति बढ़ रही है। भ्रांतियों पर भरोसा करने के कारण पुरुष नसबंदी से भागते हैं।



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मातृत्व अवकाश पर गई और अशक्त महिलाओं की भी लग गई चुनाव में झूटी

प्रीति सिंह, श्रेया शर्मा

8 अक्टूबर 2020, दैनिक भास्कर

समय- दोपहर के डेढ़ बजे.... जगह- राजकीय बालिका उच्च माध्यमिक विद्यालय गर्दनीबाग... स्कूल के गेट के अंदर एक-एक कर जाती महिलाएं... तैनात कर्मी हर किसी का टेम्परेचर लेता है। एक अन्य कर्मी सैनेटाइजर देता है। अंदर जगह-जगह महिलाओं की भीड़ लगी हुई है। सोशल डिस्टेंसिंग का कहीं कोई नामो-निशान नहीं है। स्कूल में महिलाओं को चुनाव कराने की ट्रेनिंग दी जा रही है। अधिकतर शिक्षिकाएं हैं। कुछ बैंक तो कुछ समाज कल्याण विभाग की कर्मी भी हैं। इन्हें चुनाव के दौरान भूमिका निभानी है। दो शिफ्टों में दी जा रही ट्रेनिंग 11 अक्टूबर तक चलेगी। एक शिफ्ट में 450 महिलाएं हैं। ट्रेनिंग उन्हें भी दी जा रही है जो चलने-फिरने में मजबूर हैं अथवा मातृत्व अवकाश पर थीं। कुछ महिलाएं तो 55 साल से ज्यादा की हैं और उनमें कई चलने-फिरने में लाचार हैं। मातृत्व अवकाश से ट्रेनिंग के लिए बुलाई गई महिलाओं की समस्या न ही स्कूल सुन रहा है ना ही अधिकारी।

केस | 2

गठिया से ग्रसित यास्मीन चल नहीं सकतीं

मोकामा प्रखंड से आई यास्मीन खातून के पैर मुड़े हुए हैं। उन्हें गठिया है। चलने और बैठने में तकलीफ होती है। उम्र करीब 50 वर्ष है। कहती हैं कई अधिकारियों को अर्जी दी लेकिन कोई सुनवाई नहीं हुई। किसी तरह ट्रेनिंग करने के लिए आ पाई हैं। वह चुनावी झूटी करने में सक्षम नहीं है। लेकिन नोडल अफसर ने उन्हें ट्रेनिंग करने और अटेडेंस बनाने के लिए कहा है।

केस | 1

बच्ची को लेकर भटक रहीं हैं रश्मि सिंह

रश्मि सिंह, केंद्रीय विद्यालय दानापुर कैट में कार्यरत हैं। मातृत्व अवकाश पर थी। ट्रेनिंग के बुलाई गई हैं। गोद में दो महीने के बच्चे को लेकर वो इधर-उधर भटकती रहीं। बच्चा सिर्फ दो महीने का है। बच्चे को लेकर झूटी और ट्रेनिंग करना संभव नहीं है। मौजूदा नोडल ऑफिसर समस्या सुन कहती हैं कि मेरे हाथ में कुछ नहीं है। आप जाकर ट्रेनिंग कर लें।

पटना जिले में 277 महिला बूथों पर 1108 महिला मतदानकर्मियों की होगी तैनाती। पटना जिले में 277 महिला बूथ बनाए गए हैं जहां पर महिलाकर्मियों की प्रतिनियुक्ति की जाएगी। इन बूथों पर 1108 महिला मतदानकर्मी की तैनाती की जाएगी। वहीं बिहार विधानसभा चुनाव के 14 विधानसभा क्षेत्रों के 7034 मतदान केंद्रों पर कुल 12,837 महिलाकर्मियों की तैनाती होगी। जिसमें 3330 महिलाकर्मी शहरी बूथों पर तथा 3611 ग्रामीण बूथों पर प्रतिनियुक्त होंगी।

ईवीएम हैंडल करने की दी जाती है जानकारी

ट्रेनिंग के दौरान महिलाओं को ईवीएम हैंडल करने की जानकारी दी जा रही है। मास्टर ट्रेनर डॉ. पूनम कुमारी कहती हैं हम इन्हें ईवीएम को ऑन तथा ऑफ करना सिखाते हैं। साथ ही पोलिंग ऑफिसर वन, पोलिंग ऑफिसर टू तथा पोलिंग ऑफिसर थ्री की भूमिका के बारे में भी विस्तार से समझा रहे हैं।

चुनावी ड्यूटी को लेकर उत्साहित हैं युवा महिलाकर्मी

मतदानकर्मी की भूमिका को लेकर युवतियां अधिक उत्साहित दिखीं। कहती हैं सरकारी कर्मी हैं तो अपनी ड्यूटी तो निभानी ही होगी। हालांकि दूर-दराजों के गांवों में चुनाव कराने को लेकर वो संशकित नजर आईं। चुनाव के दौरान पिकअप की सुविधा नहीं मिलने तथा शौचालय की असुविधा से परेशान दिखीं।



Priti Singh started as a freelancer and then worked with newspapers and news channels like Vividh Bharti and Doordarshan. Her journalistic journey allows her to give voice to the problems of ordinary people through her writings.



Shreya Sharma has been a journalist for four years. Having worked on nearly every beat at the Dainik Bhaskar, she enjoys covering women and women's issues.

स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम : शोषण से पीड़ित महिलाएं मदद क्यों नहीं मांगती?

14 अगस्त 2020, फेमिनिज्मइंडिया.कॉम

अक्सर जब हम अपने आसपास घरेलू हिंसा या शोषण होते हुए देखते हैं या उसके बारे में सुनते हैं, हमारे मन में सबसे पहले यह सवाल आता है कि पीड़िता इतने समय से यह उत्पीड़न बर्दाश्त क्यों कर रही है? वह भाग क्यों नहीं जाती या मदद क्यों नहीं मांगती? आखिर क्या ऐसी मजबूरी होगी जो वह इतना जुल्म सह रही है? हमारा सवाल पूरी तरह जायज़ है। हम नहीं समझ पाते कि कोई व्यक्ति ऐसी स्थिति से खुद को निकालने की कोशिश क्यों नहीं कर रहा, लेकिन हम नहीं जानते कि शोषण का मानसिक प्रभाव कितना गहरा होता है। अक्सर घरेलू शोषण और हिंसा पीड़ित व्यक्ति का नज़रिया ही बदल देते हैं। पीड़ित व्यक्ति यह सोचने लगता है कि उसे उसी की किसी गलती की सज़ा दी जा रही है। वह जो उत्पीड़न सह रहा है वह उसी की भलाई के लिए है। उसकी नज़रों में उसका शोषण करनेवाला इंसान कभी गलत हो ही नहीं सकता। वह उसके लिए एक देवता बन जाता है जिसे खुश रखने के लिए शोषित व्यक्ति अपनी ज़िंदगी और अपनी शारीरिक और मानसिक स्थिति की बलि चढ़ा देता है। इस मानसिक प्रवृत्ति का एक नाम है: स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम।

‘स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम’ शब्द का निर्माण स्वीडिश मनोचिकित्सक डॉ निल्स बेयरोट ने किया था। साल 1973 में स्वीडन की राजधानी स्टॉकहोम में एक बैंक डकैत ने चार बैंक कर्मचारियों को एक हफ्ते तक बंदी बनाकर रखा था। डकैत की गिरफ्तारी और कर्मचारियों को छुड़ाने के बाद देखा गया कि कर्मचारियों में से कोई भी दोषी को सज़ा दिलाने के पक्ष में नहीं था। बल्कि वे उसकी ज़मानत के लिए पैसे भी इकट्ठे करने की कोशिश कर रहे थे। अपने ही उत्पीड़क से उन्हें इस तरह का लगाव हो गया था कि वे नहीं चाहते थे कि उसके साथ कुछ बुरा हो।

इसी तरह का ‘स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम’ देखा गया है घरेलू हिंसा से पीड़ित महिलाओं में। वे उन मर्दों का बचाव करती पाई जाती हैं जो उनसे मारपीट करते हैं, उन्हें घर में बंदी बनाकर रखते हैं, उनका यौन शोषण करते हैं। अपने उत्पीड़क के बारे में वे कहती हैं कि वह ‘दिल का अच्छा’ है, बस कभी कभी ‘मेरी वजह से उसे गुस्सा आ जाता है’। अपनी स्थिति के लिए वे खुद को ही दोषी मानती हैं और सोचती हैं कि वे खुद को बदलने की कोशिश करें तो शोषण बंद हो जाएगा पर ऐसा कभी होता नहीं है।

‘स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम’ होने का एक कारण यह है कि हमारे समाज में घरेलू हिंसा की पीड़िताओं के लिए विकल्प बहुत कम हैं। मनोवैज्ञानिक डी. एल. ग्रैहम के मुताबिक एक पीड़ित महिला को ‘स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम’ ग्रसित तब माना जा सकता है जब उसमें यह चार लक्षण नज़र आए : पीड़िता हर वक़्त इस डर में जीती है कि उसका पार्टनर उसे शारीरिक या मानसिक खतरा पहुंचाएगा। चाहे वह यह डर ज़ाहिर करे या न करे। पीड़िता मानती है कि उसका उत्पीड़क एक बहुत अच्छा इंसान है जो उससे बहुत प्यार करता है क्योंकि वह कभी-कभी उस पर रहम दिखाता है। जैसे कि अगर एक औरत का पति हर रोज़ उसे पीटता है मगर एक दिन पीटने के बाद उसे बाहर डिनर के लिए ले जाता है, तो वह बहुत खुश हो जाती है और खुद को भाग्यवान समझने लगती है, यह भूलकर कि उसे रोज़ शोषित होना पड़ता है।

उत्पीड़क पीड़िता को बाहर की दुनिया के साथ किसी तरह के संपर्क की इजाज़त नहीं देता। उसे परिवार और दोस्तों से मिलने से मना करता है, उसके फ़ोन और सोशल मीडिया पर नज़र रखता है और उसे अकेले घर से बाहर निकालने तक नहीं देता। ऐसे में उत्पीड़क ही पीड़िता की पूरी दुनिया बन जाता है और वह मानने लगती है कि वह जो भी कहता या करता है, वह सब सही है। इस तरह पीड़िता अपना नज़रिया, विवेक और अस्तित्व खो बैठती है।

पीड़िता यह स्वीकार करती है कि उसे अपनी पूरी ज़िंदगी उत्पीड़क के साथ ही गुज़ारनी है और वह चाहकर भी उससे दूर भाग नहीं सकती, इसलिए उसे खुश रखने में ही भलाई है।

और पढ़ें : पॉली सिस्टिक ओवरी सिंड्रोम (पीसीओडी) – महिलाओं से जुड़ी एक गंभीर बीमारी स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम पर आधारित रिश्ता कभी भी मज़बूत नहीं होता। इसमें वह खुशी, या वह सुरक्षा नहीं मिलते जो एक स्वस्थ प्रेम संबंध में मिलते हैं। इस तरह के रिश्ते की बुनियाद प्यार नहीं, डर, आतंक, और गुलामी हैं। एक ‘स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम’ ग्रसित महिला का व्यवहार कुछ इस तरह का हो सकता है:

1. वह हमेशा अपने पार्टनर से डर-डरके जीती है – वह उससे अपनी भावनाएं खुलकर साझा नहीं कर सकती या उससे कोई मांग नहीं कर सकती इस डर से कि वह गुस्सा हो जाए और उस पर हिंसा करे। जैसे एक साधारण रिश्ते में हम अपने पार्टनर से खुलकर बात कर सकते हैं, ऐसे रिश्ते में पीड़िता अपने शब्द बहुत सावधानी से चुनती है ताकि उसका पार्टनर नाराज़ न हो।

2. वह स्वीकार नहीं करना चाहती कि उसके साथ शोषण हो रहा है – अपने पार्टनर के व्यवहार के लिए वह कई तरह के बहाने बनाती हैं। जैसे, “वो गुस्सा बहुत जल्दी हो जाते हैं”, “गलती

मेरी ही थी”, या “शायद काम की वजह से उनका मूड ठीक नहीं है।” वह मानने को तैयार नहीं होती कि गलती उसके पार्टनर के स्वभाव में हो सकती है।

3. पार्टनर को खुश रखने के लिए वह अपने शारीरिक या मानसिक हालत को अनदेखा कर देती है – अपने पार्टनर की हर ज़रूरत पूरी करने में वह इतनी व्यस्त हो जाती है कि अपने आप पर ध्यान नहीं दे पाती है। इस तरह वह एक तरह से अपने पार्टनर की गुलाम बन जाती है और खुद की ज़रूरतों को नज़रअंदाज़ करके उसे खुश करने में लगी रहती है।

4. वह अपने शुभचिंतकों को अपना दुश्मन समझती है – वह हर चीज़ अपने उत्पीड़क पार्टनर के नज़रिये से ही देखती है, वह उन्हीं लोगों को खुद से दूर कर देती है जो उसका भला चाहते हैं। अगर कोई दोस्त या परिजन उसे समझाने की कोशिश करे कि उसका शोषण हो रहा है, वह उन पर उसका घर तोड़ने का आरोप लगाती है। यहां तक की अगर कोई उसके पार्टनर के बारे में पुलिस में शिकायत भी करे तो वह अपने पार्टनर का ही बचाव करती है।

5. डिप्रेशन या तनाव जैसे मानसिक लक्षण नज़र आते हैं। शोषण सहना एक इंसान को मानसिक तौर पर पूरी तरह खत्म कर देता है। मानसिक स्वास्थ्य पर इसका बहुत बड़ा असर होता है। पीड़िता में डिप्रेशन, ऐंगज़ाइटी, पोस्ट-ट्रॉमैटिक स्ट्रेस डिसऑर्डर (पीटीएसडी) इत्यादि के लक्षण नज़र आ सकते हैं।

‘स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम’ होने का एक कारण यह है कि हमारे समाज में घरेलू हिंसा की पीड़िताओं के लिए विकल्प बहुत कम हैं। खासकर भारत में शादी के बाद एक औरत का वापस मायके में आने को अच्छा नहीं माना जाता। यहां औरतों को सिखाया जाता है कि पति चाहे कैसा भी हो, उसका हर व्यवहार सह लेना ज़रूरी है। तलाक को अभी भी एक बुरा शब्द समझा जाता है और इसकी प्रक्रिया भी बहुत लंबी और जटिल है। ऊपर से पुलिस भी विश्वसनीय नहीं है और कई बार पुलिस और अदालत पीड़िता को ही दोषी ठहरा देते हैं। इसी वजह से औरतें शोषण के साथ जीना सीख लेती हैं, उसे जीवन का एक आम हिस्सा समझ लेती हैं और स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम का शिकार हो जाती हैं।

स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम से उभरना बहुत मुश्किल है पर काउंसलिंग और चिकित्सा के ज़रिए यह संभव है। उम्मीद है भविष्य में हिंसा से पीड़ित महिलाओं के सशक्तिकरण के लिए ज़्यादा से ज़्यादा संसाधन उपलब्ध होंगे ताकि उन्हें मदद मिल सके और स्टॉकहोम सिंड्रोम का सामना न करना पड़े।



Feminism In India is an award-winning digital intersectional feminist media organisation to learn, educate and develop a feminist sensibility among the youth. FII amplifies the voices of women and marginalized communities using tools of art, media, culture, technology and community.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

A DAY WITH AN ASHA WORKER

Anna Keerthy George

31 May 2020, www.youtube.com/doolnews



#ASHAworker #ASHAworkerala #Covid19Kerala

A day with an ASHA worker | Documentary | ആശമാർക്ക്
ആശങ്കകളില്ല, കരുതലോടെ അവർ പോരാട്ടത്തിലാണ്

'A Day With An ASHA Worker' is an attempt to take a closer look at the lives of ASHA workers, who have been pivotal in Kerala's battle against Covid 19. The documentary narrates the story of Sreeja, an ASHA worker from Kozhikode. The camera incessantly follows Sreeja throughout the documentary and her story gets unfurled before the spectator on its own, instead of employing a third person to recite her tale.

When a pandemic hit the world and people were caught inside their houses without being able to connect or communicate with each other, ASHA workers had to take up the duty of holding them closer to the world outside. They showed up at every doorstep, checked on everyone regularly, and became the only resort for the common man at his hardest

times. Being a grassroots link to the health care sector, an ASHA worker has always had a significant role to play in the community she serves. The pandemic now stands as a testimony to this. However, these ASHA workers come from the lowest strata of the society, and are ridiculously underpaid considering the time and energy they invest on the field. Everyday is a struggle for them at their workspace and household, with the gender-specific ordeals they have to encounter. ASHA workers thus become a representation of an underprivileged fraction of the society themselves. The portrayal of a day from Sreeja's life thus ceases to be a personal account of one woman, and grows further to reflect the day-to-day realities of ASHA workers in general.



Anna Keerthy George heads the Multimedia division of DoolNews. Her interests are socially relevant issues ranging from gender discrimination to contemporary and world politics. She is a postgraduate in Mass Communication and started her journalistic career in 2018 at Dool News.

पीरियड्स पर चुप्पी और खिलाड़ियों पर इसका असर

वंदना ढांड

16 सितम्बर 2020, बीबीसी गुजराती

उत्तर प्रदेश के छोटे से गाँव में लड़कों से दंगल करती एक लड़की और वहाँ से राष्ट्रमंडल खेलों और एशियन गेम्स में मेडल जीतने तक का सफ़र। इस सफ़र में 22 साल की पहलवान दिव्या काकरन ने कई चुनौतियाँ पार की हैं, वो भी कुश्ती जैसे पुरुष प्रधान खेल में। पर एक चुनौती ऐसी है जिससे कई महिला खिलाड़ी अब भी जूझ रही हैं और वो है पीरियड्स और इस पर छाई रहने वाली चुप्पी।

दिल्ली के एक जिम में सुबह की प्रैक्टिस के बाद दिव्या जब इस मुद्दे पर बात करती हैं तो खुल कर बोलती हैं। दिव्या बताती हैं, “कई बार लड़कियाँ अपने कोच को नहीं बता पातीं कि हमें ये प्रॉब्लम है। ऊपर से टॉयलट भी अच्छे नहीं होते कि जाकर पैड चेंज करें। अब बार-बार कोच को क्या बोलें। डर लगा रहता है कि ट्रेनिंग के बीच कपड़े गंदे न हो जाएँ। अलग ही हिचकिचाहट रहती है। कोच को अगर पता रहता था कि हमें ये प्रॉब्लम है तो वो मैट पर चढ़ने नहीं देते थे। वो सोचते हैं कि हम साफ़ नहीं हैं। मंगलवार को अखाड़े में प्रसाद बाँटते हैं। तो लेने नहीं देते थे।” अब भले ही दिव्या एक नामी खिलाड़ी हो गई हैं और उन्हें ऐसी दिक्कतों का सामना कम करना पड़ता है लेकिन दिव्या जैसी कई लड़कियाँ हैं जो खेल के दौरान इस समस्या से गुज़रती हैं। माहवारी और खिलाड़ियों को लेकर दोबारा बहस इसलिए भी शुरू हुई है क्योंकि इस बार आईपीएल टीम राजस्थान रॉयल्स ने सैनिटरी पैड बनाने वाली कंपनी नाइन के साथ डील की है। ऐसा करने वाली वो चंद स्पोर्ट्स टीमों में से एक है।

राजस्थान रॉयल्स के सीओओ जेक लश मैक्क्रम ने बीबीसी से बातचीत में बताया, “नामी खिलाड़ियों का इस मुद्दे पर बात करना बड़ी पहल है। रॉबिन उथप्पा, बेन स्टोक्स, स्टीव स्मिथ ये खिलाड़ी युवाओं के लिए हीरो हैं, लड़कों और लड़कियों दोनों के लिए। जब ये लोग पीरियड्स, माहवारी पर बात करेंगे। तो इस चर्चा को घर-घर ले जाना आसान होगा।” समस्या मानसिकता के साथ-साथ हाइजीन से भी जुड़ी हुई है। सुनीता गोदारा अंतरराष्ट्रीय मैराथन रनर रह चुकी हैं और अब युवा खिलाड़ियों को कोचिंग देती हैं।

वो कहती हैं, “ट्रेनिंग के दौरान खिलाड़ियों को बहुत पसीना आता है। महिला खिलाड़ियों को ये बताना ज़रूरी होता है कि हर ट्रेनिंग के बाद पैड बदलना चाहिए वरना कई तरह की बीमारियाँ

हो सकती हैं या घाव हो सकते हैं। लेकिन बहुत बार, ख़ासकर छोटी जगहों पर इस बारे में बात नहीं की जाती क्योंकि कोच और खिलाड़ी दोनों झिझकते हैं।

हालात बदलने के लिए सुनीता गोदारा के कुछ सुझाव हैं। उनका कहना है, “पहले तो कोच को मामले की संवेदनशीलता समझाना ज़रूरी है। कोच और खिलाड़ी दोनों के लिए सेशन होने चाहिए, उसमें वरिष्ठ महिला खिलाड़ी को शामिल करें, डॉक्टर को शामिल करें।” “कोच को लगता होगा कि लड़कियाँ बहाना कर रही हैं पर दरअसल वो इसलिए ट्रेनिंग मिस कर देती हैं क्योंकि उनके पीरियड्स चल रहे होते हैं और वो किसी को बता नहीं पातीं।” दिव्या काकरन सवाल करती हैं कि खिलाड़ी के लिए तो एक-एक दिन अहम होता है पर कई बार लड़कियाँ महीने में 4-5 ट्रेनिंग मिस कर देती हैं क्योंकि उन्हें बताने वाला कोई नहीं होता कि उस दौरान ट्रेनिंग को बेहतर तरीके से कैसे मैनेज करना है।

माहवारी के प्रति सामाजिक रवैया न सिर्फ़ खिलाड़ियों के प्रदर्शन को प्रभावित करता है बल्कि इस बात पर भी असर डालता है कि वो कौन से खेल चुनती हैं।

बीबीसी ने साल 2020 में भारत के 14 राज्यों में खेल से जुड़ा सर्वे किया था जिसके मुताबिक, 25 फ़ीसदी लोगों ने ये कहा कि कुछ ख़ास खेल महिलाओं के लिए ठीक नहीं हैं और उसका एक कारण माहवारी था। वहीं, बीबीसी के एलीट ब्रिटिश स्पोर्ट्सवुमेन सर्वे के मुताबिक, 60 फ़ीसदी लोगों ने कहा कि पीरियड्स की वजह से उनका प्रदर्शन प्रभावित हुआ और उन्होंने इसकी वजह से ट्रेनिंग या प्रतियोगिता छोड़ी थी। 40 फ़ीसदी ने कहा कि कोच के साथ इस बारे में बात करने में वो असहज महसूस करती हैं।

सैनिटरी पैड फेंकने के लिए अलग से डिब्बे न होना, खेल के दौरान सफ़ेद कपड़े.. ऐसी कई दिक्कतों का ज़िक्र महिला खिलाड़ियों ने किया है। एक खिलाड़ी ने बीबीसी को बताया, “जब मैं युवा थी, तो ये मेरे लिए बड़ी समस्या थी। मैं हर प्रतियोगिता में टॉयलेट पेपर साथ लेकर जाती थी कि पता नहीं वहाँ मिले न मिले। ऐसे शौचालय भी होते थे जिनके दरवाज़े नहीं होते थे।” कई देशों में माहवारी के दौरान महिला खिलाड़ियों की मदद के लिए टेक्रॉलजी का सहारा लिया जा रहा है।

जुलाई 2019 में अमरीकी फ़ुटबॉल टीम ने वर्ल्ड कप जीता था। उनकी सफलता का एक कारण यह भी माना गया कि ऐप के ज़रिए हर महिला खिलाड़ी के पीरियड्स को ट्रैक किया जाता था और उसी हिसाब से उनकी डाइट और ट्रेनिंग रखी जाती थी। कोच सुनीता गोदारा

कहती हैं, “भारत में भी जब कैप में खिलाड़ियों की प्रोफाइलिंग होती है तो महिला खिलाड़ियों के लिए पीरियड्स का भी कॉलम होना चाहिए। ऐसे में अगर लड़कियाँ हिचकती भी हैं तो कोच को खुद से ही पता रहेगा और वो उनकी ट्रेनिंग और डाइट का ध्यान रख पाएँगे। माहवारी को लेकर खेल जगत में किस कदर चुप्पी रही है इसका अंदाज़ा इसी बात से लगाया जा सकता है कि किसी सैनिटरी पैड को टूर्नामेंट का स्पॉन्सर बनाने के बारे में कुछ साल पहले तक सोचा भी नहीं जा सकता था।

बात 1995 की है जब महिला टेनिस एसोसिएशन टूर ने महिलाओं के लिए सैनिटरी प्रोडक्ट बनाने वाली कंपनी से करार करने से सिर्फ इसलिए मना कर दिया था क्योंकि इससे छवि पर बुरा असर पड़ेगा। न्यूयॉर्क टाइम्स ने हेडलाइन छापी थी, “टेनिस: छवि के चक्कर में महिला टेनिस डील डूबी।” जबकि एक अन्य अखबार की सुर्खी थी, “टेनिस टूर ने दिखाया कि महिलाओं का हाइजीन अब भी एक निजी मामला ही है।”

न्यूयॉर्क टाइम्स के मुताबिक मार्तिना नवरातिलोवा ने कहा था, “खिलाड़ी इसका समर्थन करना चाहते थे। लेकिन हम अपने लोकल स्पॉन्सर को नहीं खो सकते थे जहाँ से 35 मिलियन डॉलर आते हैं क्योंकि वो नहीं चाहते थे कि वुमेन टेनिस एसोसिएशन एक सैनिटरी ब्रैंड के साथ जुड़े। इसे स्टिगमा की तरह नहीं देखना चाहिए लेकिन ऐसा है।”

तब से लेकर अब तक चीज़ें बदली हैं। आप टीवी पर सैनिटरी पैड के विज्ञापन देखते हैं। 2009 में सरीना विलियम्स ने एक कंपनी के लिए विज्ञापन किया जो महिलाओं के लिए सैनिटरी प्रोडक्ट बनाती है। भारत में साइना नेहवाल और पीवी सिंधु विज्ञापन कर चुकी हैं।

यूनिसेफ़ की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक, भारत में करीब 42 फ़ीसदी लड़कियों के पास माहवारी के दौरान सैनिटरी पैड जैसे सुरक्षित माध्यम उपलब्ध नहीं हैं। इस बार स्वतंत्रता दिवस के मौके पर प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने लाल किले से भाषण में सैनिटरी पैड पर बात करते हुए कहा था कि पाँच करोड़ महिलाओं को एक रुपये में पैड मुहैया करवाए गए हैं। लाल किले से भाषण में सैनिटरी पैड शब्द शायद पहले नहीं सुना गया। ये सांकेतिक या सिम्बॉलिक क़दम हो सकता है। पर उम्मीद यही है कि इसी बहाने माहवारी जैसे मुद्दों पर खुले में बहस होती रही। दिव्या काकरन भी अपनी बात कुछ यूँ ही समेटती हैं, “आख़िर, माहवारी एक स्वभाविक प्रक्रिया है, तो महिला खिलाड़ियों से अलग बर्ताव क्यों हो? अगह हमें और ओलंपिक मेडल जीतने हैं तो ऐसी बातों से ऊपर उठकर खेलना होगा।”

दिव्या जिन्होंने इस मुद्दे पर जागरूक करने के लिए अपनी माँ, दादी और कोच को भी समझाया और आज वो अर्जुन पुरस्कार जीतने वाली सबसे कम उम्र की खिलाड़ियों में से एक हैं। उन्होंने इस साल एशियन कुश्ती चैंपियनशिप में गोल्ड तो जीता ही है, अब तैयारी अगले ओलंपिक की है।

(Translated from Gujarati to Hindi)



Vandana Dhand is a multimedia journalist with experience of over 20 years in different roles across TV, digital and radio. She has worked with BBC English, Hindi and Urdu at various levels.





POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES: DECODED

Policies do not exist in isolation. They are embedded in their environment and the broader economic and political contexts. As a result, we influence and also get impacted by them.

Citizens learn how government policies will affect them through the media, and likewise, governments gain feedback on their policies and programs through the media. The media is the primary conduit between those who want to influence policy and policymakers controlling the scope of political discourse and regulating the flow of information. When you transform the beliefs of the people, politicians and political parties transform with them. This section reflects the gamut of social issues that India is entrenched in. These problems demand to be recognized by individuals and governments alike to work together towards a better future. This section has six articles on critical social issues ranging from poverty, women empowerment to gendered and age-specific violence.

It is a fact that policies do not necessarily translate into action and change at the ground level, the most shocking being the practice of manual scavenging, which continues despite it being banned. Of the 1.2 million manual scavengers in India, about 95% to 98% are women. Yet, despite their overwhelming numbers, there is hardly any research or a government report shedding light on these women. The report by Gaon Connection titled, 'हाथों से मैला उठाने की कुप्रथा यहाँ पीढ़ियों से चली आ रही, इस दंश से अभी तक आजाद नहीं हुई ये महिलाएं', sheds light on this abhorrent practice

of manual scavenging prevalent in many parts of India despite stringent provisions in the law.

How seriously does our government take women while formulating the budget and allocating resources to various right holders? Jinat Rehana Islam, in her article, 'A false fairytale in the budget', reports on the lack of representation of women in the Union Budget 2021. She makes a note of programmes and policies which should address the inherent gender disparities. The informative article suggests setting up an independent commission to monitor programmes like 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' or 'Ujjwala Yojana.'

Another article by Anagha Pathak titled, 'Threatened and disgraced and told to fight for my rights, which I did', brings to the readers an inspiring story of Sunanda. It showcases her exceptional efforts to fight the patriarchal system to get her legal land ownership right. Notably, she became the first woman in her village to drive a moped, earning the title "Scootywali bai". Now she helps other women facing similar issues.

Women in India are casting their ballots in more significant numbers over the last few years. Today, women's turnout is higher than men's in two-thirds of India's state elections. Juhi Smita aptly captures this remarkable trend in a deeply patriarchal society in her article titled, 'महिलाओं को इंतज़ार, उनके स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा और आर्थिक नीतियों पर कौन करेगा बात'. She highlights how women's health, education and economic empowerment can come to the forefront with increased political participation of women in a state like Bihar.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unimaginable hardships for migrant workers employed mainly in India's informal sector. An article by Sanskriti Talwar titled, 'One nation, no ration card', highlights the food and income insecurity of the jobless migrants after the two deadly waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. She documents one such case study of a woman named Ruksana who failed to get her ration card and suffered as a result of this, through the lockdown.

Not just the food and income security, but even physical safety and security of girls and children is threatened during the Covid times. Data by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) highlights the grim reality of the reported rate of child abductions which has risen at a far sharper

pace than the overall crime rate in the country. Subhakanta Padhiary, in his article, 'Helpless Angles', reports on this issue prevalent in the state of Odisha using the case study of baby Paree. He highlights various campaigns to address the problems and underscores how bleak and ineffective they are.

Policies aimed at reducing gender discrimination sometimes go off the mark and may end up impacting negatively the very people they seek to empower- the women, if the internalized misogyny and patriarchy are not addressed. This is beautifully depicted in a musical film by 'Agents of Ishq' titled, 'Aika To The Baika: Police Complaint Lavani', that looks at how gender biases subvert the justice system. It highlights the fight against mansplaining and victim-blaming. It suggests that the Gender-sensitization of police officers may help create an ecosystem that would help women come forward to file complaints against gender-based violence.

PRINT & WEB MEDIA

हाथों से मैला उठाने की कुप्रथा यहाँ पीढ़ियों से चली आ रही, इस देश से अभी तक आज़ाद नहीं हुई ये महिलाएं गाँव कनेक्शन.कॉम

12 दिसंबर 2020

शौचालय निर्माण में हर साल करोड़ों रुपए खर्च होने वाले स्वच्छ भारत में आज भी ये महिलाएं हाथ से मैला उठाने को मजबूर हैं। गाँव कनेक्शन की विशेष सीरीज 'स्वच्छ भारत में मैला उठाती महिलाएं' के पहले भाग में पढ़िए आखिर ये महिलाएं मैला उठाने को क्यों विवश हैं? क्या है इनकी मजबूरी?

जालौन (उत्तर प्रदेश) बांस की डलिया बगल में दबाकर नीले रंग की छींटदार साड़ी पहने शोभारानी रोजमर्रा की तरह आज भी सुबह 10 बजे मैला उठाने के लिए गाँव की गलियों में निकल पड़ी थीं। नाक पर साड़ी का पल्लू बांधकर ये मैला उठा रहीं थीं। शोभारानी अपने गांव में ही उन घरों से मैला (मानव मल) उठाने जा रही थीं, जिनके घरों में या तो शौचालय नहीं हैं या फिर वो आदतन दो ईंट रखकर शौच करते हैं और शौच के बाद उस पर राख आदि डाल देते हैं। शोभा उसे लोहे के एक खुरपे की सहायता से उठाकर अपनी डलिया में रखती हैं और मल वाली जगह पर झाड़ू लगाती हैं। उठाए गए मैले को सर पर उठाकर गांव के बाहर फेंककर आती हैं। ये उनका रोज का काम है। शोभारानी की तरह उनके गांव में वाल्मीकि समुदाय की दूसरी महिलाएं भी ऐसा ही काम रोज करती हैं। सरल शब्दों में इसे आप हाथ से मैला उठाने की कुप्रथा कह सकते हैं।

देशभर में स्वच्छ भारत मिशन योजना काफी समय से चल रही है। शौचालय बनाने और स्वच्छता का पाठ पढ़ाने में करोड़ों रुपए खर्च किए जा चुके हैं और खर्च किये भी जा रहे हैं, लेकिन देश के कई हिस्सों में हाथ से मैला उठाने का काम आज भी जारी है। आम बजट 2020-21 में 'स्वच्छ भारत अभियान' के लिए 12,300 करोड़ रुपये का प्रावधान किया गया है। सरकार की स्वच्छ भारत मिशन- ग्रामीण वेबसाइट के अनुसार भारत के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में दो अक्टूबर 2014 से अब तक 10, 72, 59, 057 शौचालय बन चुके हैं। शौचालय निर्माण में हर साल औसतन 10,000 करोड़ रुपए खर्च होते हैं।

उत्तर प्रदेश की राजधानी लखनऊ से करीब 250 किलोमीटर दूर जालौन जिले की शोभारानी को अपनी उम्र ठीक से नहीं पता, देखने पर वो 45-50 वर्ष की लगती हैं। रोज सुबह ये अपने गाँव के 10-12 घरों में हाथ से मैला उठाने का काम 30-35 साल से कर रही हैं। ये काम पहले से कम तो हुआ है पर पूरी तरह से अभी समाप्त नहीं हुआ है। इनके पति ज्यादा काम कर नहीं पाते, एक बेटा दिव्यांग हैं। बच्चों का पेट भरने के लिए इतने वर्षों से मैला उठाना इनकी मजबूरी है। ये समुदाय भूमिहीन होता है, इनके पास जीवकोपार्जन का कोई साधन नहीं है। पीढ़ियों से मैला उठाने का काम ये लोग करते आ रहे हैं।

खबर पढ़ते वक्त आपके मन में कई सवाल उठ रहे हैं होंगे कि आखिर स्वच्छ भारत में शोभारानी हाथ से मैला क्यों उठा रही हैं? क्या गाँव में अभी पूरी तरह शौचालय नहीं बने या फिर कोई और वजह? ये सवाल भी जेहन में आ सकता है कि शायद मैला उठाने के इन्हें ज्यादा पैसे मिलते होंगे? लेकिन शोभारानी या उन जैसी उनके समाज की तमाम महिलाओं को इस काम के बदले कोई पैसे नहीं मिलते। मैला उठाने के बदले सिर्फ दिन की कुछ रोटियाँ, नमक या अचार या फिर कई बार थोड़ी बहुत सब्जी मिल जाती है। हाथ से मैला उठाना इनकी मजबूरी है क्योंकि इन्हें परिवार का पेट पालना है। शोभारानी के गाँव में इनकी जाति के कुल पांच घर हैं। इन सबने एक दो साल से खाना लेना बंद कर दिया है जिसके बदले इन्हें साल में 8-10 पसेरी (पसेरी मतलब ढाई किलो) गेहूँ मिलते हैं।

अपने पोते-पोतियों की तरफ इशारा करते हुए शोभारानी कहती हैं, “बच्चों का पेट भरने के लिए बेबस में ये गंदा काम करना पड़ता है। किसे अच्छा लगता है कि वो हाथ से दूसरों का मैला (शौच) उठाकर फेंके? नहीं करेंगे तो ये बच्चे खाएंगे क्या? मुंह में कपड़ा बाँध लेते हैं, कई बार उल्टी हो जाती है, पूरी जिंदगी गुजर गयी पर ये काम करना बंद नहीं हुआ।”

शीर्ष 10 राज्यों में मैला ढोने वालों की संख्या

राज्य	सर्वे के लिए चुने गये जिलों की संख्या	मैनुअल स्केवेंजर्स के लिए रजिस्ट्रेशन कराने वालों की संख्या	राज्य सरकार द्वारा चिन्हित मैनुअल स्केवेंजर्स
उत्तर प्रदेश	47	41068	19712
मध्य प्रदेश	14	8572	562
उत्तराखंड	4	7440	6033
राजस्थान	20	7381	2590
महाराष्ट्र	14	7378	7378
बिहार	16	4757	0
ओडिशा	5	2024	1982
कर्नाटक	6	1803	1754
तमिलनाडु	6	1433	62
पश्चिम बंगाल	6	1329	637



जिन घरों से आप मैला उठाने जाती हैं, वहां आपके साथ कैसा बर्ताव होता है? छुआछूत के बारे में सवाल करने पर वे कहती हैं, “हम हो चाहें हमारे बच्चे, ये छुआछूत तो हमारे मरने के बाद ही खत्म होगा। अभी भी जब मैला लेकर निकलते हैं तो कई लोग पीछे से पानी छिड़कने लगते हैं। रोटी मांगने जाओ तो दरवाजे के बाहर से कुंडी बजाओ, दूर से रोटी देते हैं। उनके बर्तन, उनका शरीर हमसे छूना नहीं चाहिए।”

शोभारानी जालौन जिला मुख्यालय से लगभग 17 किलोमीटर दूर कदौरा ब्लॉक के संदी गाँव की रहने वाली हैं। ये जबसे इस गाँव की बहु बनकर आयीं तबसे यही काम कर रही हैं। इस गाँव में बाल्मीकी समुदाय के ज्यादातर लोगों ने गाँव कनेक्शन को बताया कि ये आज भी यही काम करते हैं। गांव कनेक्शन की रिपोर्टर ने इस गाँव में शोभारानी और ममता को नौ दिसंबर 2020 को कुछ घरों से मैला उठाते देखा भी।

जिला मुख्यालय से लगभग 35 किलोमीटर दूर मरगाया गांव की 44 वर्षीय गुड्डी देवी गुस्से में कह रहीं थीं, “हमेशा कोई न कोई आकर वीडियो बनाकर ले जाता है पर हमारी जिंदगी में कोई सुधार नहीं हुआ। आपको तो पैसे मिलते होंगे पर हम लोगों से वीडियो बनाने के अलावा कभी कोई मिलने नहीं आता। इस कोरोना में तो बच्चों का पेट भरना मुश्किल है।” मरगाया गाँव में गाँव कनेक्शन की टीम शाम को पहुंची, वहां के वाल्मीकि समुदाय के लोगों ने वीडियो बनाने से मना कर दिया।

“हमारे बच्चों को दूध, घी के तो सपने भी नहीं आते। जबसे लॉकडाउन लगा है तबसे लोग सब्जी भी देना कम कर दिए हैं। नमक रोटी इस लॉकडाउन में खानी पड़ रही है। हमारी किसको सुध है? सब कोरोना में सफाई की बात करते हैं और हम गंदा काम करते हैं,” गुड्डी अपनी आप बीती बता रहीं थीं।

सामाजिक न्याय एवं अधिकारिता मंत्रालय के अधीन काम करने वाली संस्था नेशनल सफाई कर्मचारी फाइनेंस एंड डेवलपमेंट कॉरपोरेशन (एनएसकेएफडीसी) द्वारा 18 राज्यों के 170 जिलों में अगस्त 2019 में एक सर्वे कराया गया था। इन जिलों में कुल 87,913 लोगों ने खुद को मैला ढोने वाला बताते हुए रजिस्ट्रेशन कराया था। जिसमें सिर्फ 42,303 लोगों को ही राज्य सरकारों ने मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स (मैला ढोने वाले लोग) के रूप में स्वीकार किया गया। इस हिसाब से जितने लोगों ने रजिस्ट्रेशन कराया था, उसमें से 50 फीसदी से भी कम लोगों को मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स माना गया है।

इस सर्वे के अनुसार पूरे देश में सबसे अधिक उत्तर प्रदेश के 47 जिलों से 41,068 लोगों ने खुद को मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स बताते हुए रजिस्ट्रेशन कराया था जबकि राज्य सरकार ने केवल 19,712 लोगों को ही मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स के रूप में स्वीकार किया है। नेशनल सफाई कर्मचारी फाइनेंस एंड डेवलपमेंट कॉरपोरेशन की वेबसाइट के अनुसार जनवरी 2019 से अगस्त 2019 तक हर महीने सर्वे किये गया है जिसमें यूपी में रजिस्ट्रेशन कराने वालों की संख्या हर महीने बढ़ी है। जहाँ जनवरी 2019 में 24,967 मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स के लिए रजिस्ट्रेशन हुए थे वहीं अगस्त 2019 में ये संख्या 41,068 तक पहुंच गयी।

मरगायां गाँव के ग्राम प्रधान उदय भानु बताते हैं, “हमारे गाँव में 85 प्रतिशत घरों में शौचालय बने हैं। लेकिन आज भी गाँव की दो महिलाएं 30-35 घरों में हाथ से मैला उठाने का काम करती हैं। जिसके बदले इन्हें रोज रोटी मिलती है।”

जिन घरों में ये महिलाएं साफ़ करने जाती हैं क्या उनके घर शौचालय नहीं बने हैं? इस पर उदय भानु कहते हैं, “सबके घर शौचालय बने हैं लेकिन कुछ लोग आदतन आज भी ईंटे पर बैठकर शौच करते हैं। ये मानसिकता है उनकी, अगर ये साफ़ करने न जाएँ तो कोई जबरजस्ती थोड़े साफ़ करवाएगा।”

नेशनल सफाई कर्मचारी फाइनेंस एंड डेवलपमेंट कॉरपोरेशन से प्राप्त आंकड़ों के अनुसार बिहार के 16 जिलों में 4,757 लोगों ने खुद को मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स बताते हुए रजिस्ट्रेशन कराया था, लेकिन राज्य सरकार ने इनमें से एक भी व्यक्ति को मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स के रूप में स्वीकार नहीं किया है। वहीं हरियाणा में 1221, जम्मू कश्मीर में 254 और तेलंगाना ने 288 लोगों ने रजिस्ट्रेशन कराया था पर राज्य सरकारों ने किसी को भी मैनुअल स्कैवेंजर्स स्वीकारा नहीं।

जुलाई 2019 में संसद से दिए गए जवाब में सामाजिक न्याय एवं अधिकारिता मंत्रालय ने कहा था कि सरकार को देश में 18 राज्यों में 170 जिलों से हाथ से मैला सफाई के 54,130 मामलों का पता चला है।

क्या जालौन जिले में मैला उठाने का काम अभी हो रहा है? इस सवाल के जवाब में जालौन के जिलाधिकारी डॉ मन्नान अख्तर ने गाँव कनेक्शन को फोन पर बताया, “हम लोगों ने दो साल पहले एक सर्वे करवाया था जिसमें चार पांच लोग किसी गाँव में मिले थे, इनके पुनर्वास के लिए इन्हें 40,000 रुपए भी दिए गये थे। अब ड्राई द्रायलेट का कॉन्सेप्ट ही नहीं है तो मैला उठाने

वाले लोग कहाँ होंगे? अगर वो ये काम कर रहे हैं और आपके पास प्रूफ है तो मुझे दीजिये।” संदी और मरगायां गाँव के बाल्मीकी समुदाय के लोगों ने गाँव कनेक्शन को बताया कि इन दोनों गाँव के 25-30 लोग अभी भी ये काम कर रहे हैं इसमें कितनी सच्चाई है? इस सवाल के जवाब में जिलाधिकारी डॉ मन्नान अख्तर ने कहा, “आपसे ज्यादा लंबे समय से मैं यहाँ रहा हूँ, ग्राम प्रधान से हमेशा संपर्क में रहता हूँ, आजतक ऐसी कोई सूचना प्राप्त नहीं हुई है। मेरी जानकारी में जिले में ऐसा कोई भी व्यक्ति नहीं है जो ये काम करता हो। संदी और मरगायां दोनों समृद्ध गाँव हैं यहाँ 25-30 ऐसे लोगों की संख्या हो ही नहीं सकती, आपको भ्रमित किया जा रहा है।”



Gaon Connection is India's first professionally run rural newspaper founded by Neelesh Misra. He has covered some of the biggest stories out of South Asia.

ONE NATION, NO RATION CARD

Sanskriti Talwar

20 October 2020, Ruralindiaonline.org

Rukhsana Khatoon, a domestic worker in Delhi, has tried for years to get a ration card in her husband's village in Bihar – and is now desperate for it with her family in a downward spiral due to the lockdown.

Two years ago, Rukhsana Khatoon applied for a ration card in Mohan Bahera, her husband's village in Bihar's Darbhanga district. With the construction of the family's pucca house completed that month, Rukhsana applied for an Aadhaar card too, which she got. She had applied for a ration card two times before, but it never came. This was her third attempt, in August 2018, and she was ready to wait. Rukhsana, 30, and her husband Mohammed Wakil, 34, were working hard and managing well. From Rukhsana's jobs as a domestic worker in five houses in West Delhi's Patel Nagar, and Wakil's work as a tailor, they brought home a combined income of Rs. 27,000 a month. Even after handling all the expenses for their family of six (three daughters aged 12, 8, 2, and a 10-year-old son) and sending Rs. 2,000 to Wakil's mother, a homemaker, in the village, the couple managed to save a bit every month.

The hard work was paying off. Wakil had opened his own small tailoring shop in the New Ranjeet Nagar area of West Delhi, hoping to earn more than the Rs. 12,000 he brought in as a tailoring shop employee. That was on March 15, 2020.

Barely a week later, the nationwide lockdown was imposed across India. Rukhsana's employers told her to stop coming to work and it soon became clear she was not going to be paid for the lockdown months. She continued to cook in one home and earned Rs. 2,400 – instead of Rs. 15,000 from working in five houses. By June she lost that job too, but soon found another one cleaning and cooking, where the new employer, concerned about the news of 'super spreaders', wanted to know if she visited a mosque. "I didn't feel bad. Everyone is scared of corona, so I understand her concern," Rukhsana said.

When Rukhsana and her family couldn't pay rent for their room in West Delhi, the landlord asked them to leave. By June, the family's savings were running out. They claimed the one-time monetary assistance of Rs. 1,000 provided by the Bihar government to its migrant workers under the Chief Minister Special Assistance Scheme, after a relative from the village alerted them about it.

"I was able to withdraw the relief sent by Nitish Kumar, but couldn't withdraw the amount Modi gave," Rukhsana said, referring to the Rs. 500 promised for three months from April under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan scheme. The bank told her there was an error in the link tied to her account. " Kya hota hai 1,000 rupees se? It didn't even last for two days," she added.

Some relief came with the food distribution that began by the end of March at the government-run Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya near her house – one meal at 11 a.m. and the other at 5 p.m. "Both times, they gave us boiled rice with dal or rajma . No spices, no salt – a meal prepared for the sick. I had to stand in a line of some 200 people. If I reached early, I would get the meal." Otherwise, Rukhsana turned to her mother, also a domestic worker, who lives nearby, for some food, rice and dal for the day. (Her father, a daily wage labourer, died many years ago due to tuberculosis.)

The lockdown meals distributed at the school were never enough for the entire family. "My husband and I used to have a small portion so that the children don't go hungry. What option did we have? We don't have a ration card here. We had applied for one in our village, but that never



came,” Rukhsana told me. Rukhsana returned to Bihar in June with her four children, aged 12, 10, 8 and 2 (not in the picture)

By the end of May, the food distribution was halted, with many migrants workers returning home, said the government. After that, a former employer gave Rukhsana some rations, including wheat, rice and dal . “We chose to stay in Delhi because there is no work in the village. Now it is getting difficult to live here,” Rukhsana had said to me on the phone on June 11.

So that month, the family began planning for Wakil to stay on in Delhi, while she and the children would return to their village in Darbhanga, around 1,170 kilometres away. By then, three months of room rent (Rs. 15,000), plus the rent for Wakil’s new shop (Rs. 16,500) were looming. Upon the family’s request, the landlords waived off the rent for two months. Before leaving for Bihar, Rukhsana managed to pay a month’s rent for the room and shop by borrowing money from her previous employers.

In Bihar, she hoped, at least some food would be assured on the ration card they were entitled to – but still don’t have. Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, all families below the poverty line are entitled to buy subsidised food grain – rice at Rs. 3 a kilo, wheat at Rs. 2 and coarse grains (millets) at Re. 1 a kilo – from designated ‘fair price shops’ (ration outlets) of the public distribution system. ‘Priority’ category households are entitled to a total of 25 kilos of foodgrains a month, while more vulnerable households covered under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana can access up to 35 kilos of foodgrains every month.

In May 2020, a nationwide rollout of the ‘One Nation, One Ration Card’ was announced by the Centre (to be completed by March 2021). This allows for ‘portability’ of the ration card (wherever it may be registered) after it is ‘seeded’ with the person’s Aadhaar number. This will, if it’s actually implemented, enable anyone in Rukhsana’s situation to access PDS rations from any outlet in the country.

The family’s neighbours in Patel Nagar heard of this new ‘portability’ on the news and told Rukhsana and Wakil. The family’s ration card, still pending in Bihar, became even more critical to get hold of. “We have to be prepared for the coming months. Who knows if we will find work in Delhi now? We could sustain ourselves in the capital with a ration card

in these times with this new system,” Rukhsana had said. “Otherwise, we will return to Bihar. Even if no work is available in our village, we will at least be able to fill our stomachs with a ration card.”

In March, Rukhsana’s husband Mohammed Wakil had opened a tailoring shop in Delhi. Now, he is struggling to re-start work. On June 17, she and the children boarded the Bihar Sampark Kranti, a Covid-19 special train, from New Delhi Railway Station. Wakil stayed back, hoping to soon resume work.

Back in Bihar, extended lockdowns till early September and the floods in Darbhanga in July and August, made things worse. Though Mohan Bahera village wasn’t flooded, travelling to enquire about the ration card became even more difficult. Still, twice between July and August 2020, Rukhsana made it to the Benipur Nagar Parishad, 10 kilometres away, and found the ration office shut.

In September, she again went to Benipur to ask about her ration card. The officials there told her it hasn’t come, and that she would have to apply once again.

“In August 2018, when I had gone with my mother-in-law to Benipur to apply for the ration card [a third time], the officials gave me a slip [of paper] and said that it would arrive at our home in the village. But my mother-in-law never received it,” she said. That was the month their pucca house was completed in Mohan Bahera, built partly with a loan of Rs. 35,000 from the local self-help group.

It’s been five years since Rukhsana first applied for a ration card. After each attempt, slips have been handed over, the card does not arrive. With her third attempt in August 2018 (the last time Rukhsana went to Bihar until June 2020) as part of the application in Benipur she had to provide a copy of the Aadhaar cards of each of her family members.

But the family had got their Aadhaar cards made in Delhi, so she had to get the address changed on these cards to their house in the village to apply for the ration card. ‘My husband would rather stay hungry than ask anyone for help,’ says Rukhsana, who awaits her ration card in Mohan Bahera village. On October 6, she told me on the phone, “For all such work to be done, it requires money [a bribe] here. Then you can get anything done.” She thinks her ration card has not been given after

all these attempts perhaps because her name is still mentioned on her mother's card in Delhi. "That will have to be deleted. Only then I think something will happen [here]."

That will require more trips to the ration offices, more paperwork. Back in Delhi, Wakil has started receiving a few tailoring orders since August. "Sometimes one or two customers show up. I earned Rs. 200-250 that day. Otherwise there are no customers at all," he says. He is managing to send Rs. 500 home every month.

When the family could again not pay rent in Delhi from June to August, the room's owner asked Wakil to vacate, and in September he moved to an even smaller dwelling; the rent for the shop is still pending. Rukhsana has applied for a loan of Rs. 30,000 with the self- help group in the village to manage rent and to repay Rs. 12,000, the couple owe to her previous employer in Delhi, and pay off vegetable vendors and others from whom she bought on credit. But that application too is pending. On October 16, she took a loan of Rs. 10,000 from a villager when a previous employer in Delhi insisted she pay back the money she borrowed during the lockdown.

Rukhsana has decided to stay in Bihar for a while. She is unsure about finding jobs as a domestic worker again in Delhi, and wants to wait for the ration card in the village. "I know my husband would rather stay hungry than ask anyone for help," she had said. "Only the government can do something and give us our ration card."



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A FALSE FAIRYTALE IN THE BUDGET

Jinat Rehana Islam

5 February 2020, Anandabazar Patrika

The Budget seems to have listed many essential commodities important to women, meaningless. Everything has been taxed, from hair clips to coffee makers, gas stoves to utensils, combs, and even hairdryers. There has been a change in the taxes of women who are not employed, but has that been beneficial? Experts have been trying to find answers to clear the doubts.

“To encourage women, the government shall provide necessary services” was the pacification given the last time around. But, it seems nothing fruitful has come out for women in the Budget. It does not mention eradicating differences based on the financial background of women. Vital problems are still unaddressed. “Women empowerment looked after in every part of the nation” are just words in the last two pages of the Budget.

Mousumi Biswas, a farmer, does not agree with all the 16 auctions to raise the farmer’s revenue or the proposed 2.30 lakh crores. She says, “Subsidies in farming are delusional, which we realised while buying machines and fertilisers.” Mousumi has still not received the money under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. The Budget promised the self-help group’s Gram Storage scheme would restore the position of women in villages as Dhanlaxmi. Mousumi, with utter grief, says, “what am I supposed to do with that? To date women farmers are not given equal status and opportunities. They do not receive pensions.”

Women workers are facing various issues. Malaria Mandi went to work for a brick kiln last year. She was given 80 to 120 rupees less than a male worker. When asked about her opinion, she said, “I don’t receive remuneration for working at home, neither does the government pay me for working outside.” Women workers who make “bidis” face area-based payment inequality. They, too, do not receive a pension. There is a 3:1 ratio of women workers in our country, for whom the Budget has always proved to be worthless. Folk singer Dulli says, “Has there been any hike in allowance for the folk singers in the Budget?” Now the question arises, has the Budget proved fruitful for the employed women? There’s no consideration in income taxes presented in the Budget,

made by the 'first' woman finance minister's second Budget. There's no discount on home loans, which is necessary to encourage women to build their own homes. It is essential to remove tax during maternity leave as the money saved helps raise the child. The money saved can be utilised to pay babysitters, or the Budget should introduce a fraternity leave. The government should consider a Budget to encourage women to run a family independently or help working and single mothers.

Women emancipation is necessary to help a nation grow. But, even after massive incidents, there's no provision to appoint women to help desks nor enough policewomen to ensure safety for women in the streets. The government should scrutinise the discrepancy between the actual fundraised and the amount used. Not using 89% of the Nirbhaya fund shows failure. They should set up an independent commission to monitor "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" or "Ujjwala Yojana."

(Translated from Bengali to English)



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महिलाओं को इंतजार, उनके स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा और आर्थिक नीतियों पर कौन करेगा बात चुनाव में भागीदार

जूही स्मिता

24 अक्टूबर 2020, प्रभात खबर

वर्ष 2014 के राष्ट्रीय चुनावों में भागीदारी के मामले में महिला मतदाताओं ने कई राज्यों में पुरुष मतदाताओं को पछाड़ दिया था। बिहार भी उनमें अव्वल रहा। वर्ष 2019 के राष्ट्रीय चुनाव में भी बिहार की महिला मतदातायें मुख्य रहीं, लेकिन, वर्ष 2020 के विधानसभा चुनाव में महिलाओं के स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा और आर्थिक सशक्तीकरण के मुद्दे पर मौन हैं, जिन पर चर्चा की सख्त जरूरत है।

एन.एफ.एच.एस की हालि रिपोर्ट के अनुसार 18 साल की कानूनी (विवाह योग्य) आयु प्राप्त करने से पहले राज्य की लगभग 42 फीसदी लड़कियों की शादी हो जाती है। कम उम्र में विवाह करने से शुरुआती गर्भधारण होता है, जो बदले में गरीब मातृस्वास्थ्य की ओर जाता है। यदि कोई महिला परिपक्वता, पोषण या शारीरिक क्षमता की सही मात्रा हासिल करने से पहले गर्भवती हो जाती है, तो उसे प्रसव के दौरान जटिलताओं का एक उच्च जोखिम, शिशुमृत्युदर के मातृत्व का एक उच्च जोखिम, और यहाँ तक कि प्रसव के वक्त गर्भपात का जोखिम भी अधिक होता है।

महिलाओं के स्वास्थ्य को लेकर सजगता की कमी

इसके अलावा एक डेटा यह भी बताता है कि भारत में, हर दूसरी महिला एनीमिक है। बिहार में प्रजनन आयु की 60.3% महिलाएं अपने भोजन में लोहे के निम्न स्तर से पीड़ित हैं, जो कुछ ऐसा है जो दूरगामी स्वास्थ्य परिणाम पैदा कर सकता है। जब यवुा माताएं एनीमिक हो जाती हैं, तो उनके बच्चों में भी लोहे की कमी और कुपोषित होने की सम्भावनायें बढ़ जाती हैं। यह चिंताजनक है कि मातृस्वास्थ्य संबंधी जटिलताओं और मातृमृत्युदर के स्पष्ट प्रसार का सुझाव देने वाले सभी सबूतों के बावजूद, बिहार में प्रजनन दर उच्चतम स्तर पर है। इसका श्रेय परिवार नियोजन के कम उठाव को दिया जा सकता है। हालांकि रॉस एंड मौलडिन के रिपोर्ट के अनुसार प्रजनन दर राजनीतिक, आर्थिक और सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक पहलुओं से जुड़ी हुई है, लेकिन गुणवत्ता स्वास्थ्य और परिवार नियोजन सेवाओं की उपलब्धता और पहुँच जैसे कारक अवलोकन कि योग्य पैटर्न को महत्वपूर्ण रूप से प्रभावित कर सकते हैं।

महिलाओं का स्वास्थ्य बेहद ही अहम मुद्दा है। इसमें सरकार को थोड़ा गंभीर होने की जरूरत है। हर विभाग की ओर से जेंडर बजटिंग होना चाहिए। इसका प्रॉपर क्रियान्वयन हो रहा है, यह सुनिश्चित करना होगा। गांव की महिलाएं अपने स्वास्थ्य को लेकर जागरूक नहीं हैं। उनकी कम उम्र में शादी, गर्भधारण, महावारी को लेकर कम जानकारी होना एनीमिया और कुपोषण अहम बातें हैं। इसके लिए विभागों में जेंडर सेंसिटिविटी ट्रेनिंग, ब्लॉक लेवल पर एडोलेसेंट हेल्थ एंड काउंसेलिंग सेंटर्स, अस्पतालों में स्किल्ड डॉक्टर्स, बेहतर प्रसव कक्ष, सचुरु ब्लड बैंक, रेफरल परिवहन प्रणाली और आगनवाड़ी सेविकाओं को कुपोषण, प्रसव और फैमिली प्लानिंग को लेकर पहल करने की जरूरत है। - निपुण गुप्ता, संचार विशेषज्ञ, यूनियनसेफ

यहां महिलाओं का स्वास्थ्य अहम मुद्दा है। हालही में एन.एफ.एच.एस डेटा में पाया है कि बिहार में 18 वर्ष की आयु की 42% महिलाओं की शादी कानूनी उम्र तक पहुंचने से पहले ही होगयी थी। कम उम्र में गर्भधारण और परिवार नियोजन को लेकर ज्यादा जानकारी नहीं होती है। सही पोषण और आयरन की गोणियों को लेकर सजगता नहीं है। ऐसे में गांवों और जिलों में इमरजेंसी केयर की सुवीधा पर ध्यान देने की जरूरत है। स्पेशलिस्ट डॉक्टर्स के साथ हॉस्पिटल स्टाफ को उपचार से जुड़ा स्किल डेवलपमेंट की ट्रेनिंग दी जानी चाहिए जिससे महिलाओं का उपचार वहीं अच्छे से हो सके। सरकार की जो भी पॉलिसी है वो लोगों तक पहुंच रहे या नहीं इस पर नजर रखनी होगी.. एनीमिया के कारण आइरन की कमी, कुपोषण, पेट में कीड़े, मलेरिया आदि प्रमुख हैं। कई बार महावारी लंबे समय तक होने पर भी महिलाओं को दिक्कत होती है लेकिन जागरूकता नहीं होने पर किसी का ध्यान नहीं जाता है। मुद्दे कई हैं बस ध्यान देने की जरूरत है। - डॉ मीना सामंत, स्त्री रोग विशेषज्ञ



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HELPLESS ANGELS

Subhakanta Padhihary

27 December 2020, Sambad

The honourable Supreme Court considers a missing child's case an 'abduction' under Section-363, Indian Penal Code. Such cases can be reported at a nearby police station or the District Child Protection Unit under the Supreme Court's 20 points order. In addition, there is the Integrated Child Protection Scheme, Special Juvenile Police Unit in every district, District Child Protection Unit, toll-free number 1098 and various child helpline centres available in our state. Operation Smile, Muskan and Paree-2 Campaign are already in place to rescue missing children since 2015. But sadly, these campaigns are ineffective with zero regularity.

The laws have been hopeless, making children highly vulnerable in the state of Orissa. As a result, numerous innocent lives are lost, precisely like the one from Jadupur, Nayagarh.

2020 July 14 - Paree was busy playing innocently near her home. When she did not get back home, her parents were left shattered as they ran around, looking for her. This news spread throughout the village as fast as lightning. Paree's father, Ashok Sahu, reported the case at Nayagarh, police headquarters.

However, days passed, but there was still no news regarding Paree. Ten days later, fossils were found in a sack by the bank of a pond close to her home. The forensic and DNA report came in and declared the fossils belonged to Paree. Mystery prevailed as people realised it was a murder. Her parents got no justice despite running from pillar to post. They attempted to burn themselves in front of the Assembly on November 24. Paree's parents indicated the involvement of Babuli Nayak in this case and accused the Cabinet Minister Arun Sahoo of trying to rescue Babuli from the conviction of law. The matter shook the assembly, and people sought justice on the National Highway. The SIT (Special Investigation Teams) then began its investigation.

They finally arrested the main culprit after the investigation revealed some startling facts. On July 14, Paree entered Saron's garden to pluck and eat blackberries. Saron took her to his home and tried raping her while

she cried out of pain. Saron choked her neck and then continued raping her dead body. Then he hid the dead body inside a sack by the bank of a nearby pond. At a press meet, the head of SIT described the brutal incident in detail.

Many such cases of innocent little kids never get solved. So the question remains: Where are all those minors? Where are all those abducted who haven't been saved?

Swati, Pihu, Kalia - so many names, so many murders unsolved.

After the most discussed murder case of Paree, another case of abduction of a minor girl from Nayagarh came to light. While playing outside, three-year-old 'Swati' disappeared suddenly. The investigations began, and the goods peddlers were suspected. Five days later, Swati's dead body was discovered from one of the ponds near Badhipatana. Similarly, since August, two-year-old 'Pihu' from the Binjharpur Police Station, Madhusudanpur, Jajpur, has been missing. It has been more than five months, yet no clues have been found in Pihu's case.

Meanwhile, there is another case of a three-year-old boy, 'Kalia', missing from Nihalprasad, Dhenkanal. After a lengthy investigation, his dead body was found from the nearest well. The investigation revealed how a woman from the neighbourhood killed the little boy and threw his body in the bore well.

(Translated from Odia to English)



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ELECTRONIC MEDIA

'THREATENED AND DISGRACED AND
TOLD TO FIGHT FOR MY RIGHTS, WHICH
I DID.'

Anagha Pathak

20 September 2020, BBC Marathi

What image comes to our mind when we hear the word 'farmer'? Probably an ageing 'man' gazing at the sky, looking for clouds. But in reality, it is the women who make 70 per cent of the workforce in Indian agriculture. So why don't we see them, hear them or even notice them? Believe it or not, our agrarian system is patriarchal. This patriarchy starts by denying women their rightful ownership of the land.

Here's the story of Sunanda Mandale, a half-literate, single mother who fought tirelessly to get her land back from her cousins after her father's death. "Land which belonged to my father went to my uncle and his son. He refused to give me my land. "Fight us in court if you can," Sunanda remembers. "I heard the word 'Court' and was scared out of my wits," she says.

Sunanda lives in Savindane village in the Pune district. With barely any formal education, she was married off at 17. However, her marriage didn't last as Her husband was an abusive drunkard. "My daughter was one when I returned to my father's house. My whole world was crashing down in 2004 when my father passed away, leaving behind my mother, my stepmother and my younger brother. All responsibilities fell on my shoulders."

Sunanda asked her cousin to return her father's land, but he refused and threatened her. "He mockingly said, 'Sue me'. Until then, I had not seen a courthouse in my entire life. I did not know any lawyer."

She slowly started learning and decided to fight each day at a time. Finally, a lawyer agreed to help her but asked for land documents. "I asked him what documents? I had no clue about anything."

Sunanda could barely read or write at that time. However, she collected

all the necessary documents required for her court case. She struggled for three years to get the proper documentation. People deceived her, extorted her and government officials closed doors on her face.

"I was unaware of many things. People charged me Rs 2000-3000 for one single 7/12 document, which was available for a nominal fee of 2 or 3 rupees."

Sunanda and her mother worked as daily wage workers. The family would save money for a court case, even though they sometimes had to sleep on an empty stomach. Finally, in 2008, she filed a civil suit for land ownership. "When the news came that my case is listed for hearing, I felt a huge wave of satisfaction. This was my first step towards victory. I felt empowered. I felt confident enough to win the case. I got this new energy, and for the first time, I realised, a woman can fight in court for her land. It's not a man's world anymore." Today, Sunanda has won the title of some of her land, while the rest is still in litigation. Sunanda learned how to read and write, and after 15 years of struggle, she graduated and is now applying to get a law degree. She now helps other women who need advice on land ownership issues, widows of farmers and impoverished women with the support from NGO Mahila Rajsatta Andolan.

"Women face many issues when it comes to land ownership. Therefore, we started to organise legal guidance and aid seminars for these women." When I first saw her in her village, I instantly recognised her because she was helping some old guy with government documents. Her body language was confident. Her eyes sparkled like someone who had fought a long battle and had won. People, her own distant family, would gossip about her, spread rumours, threaten her and try to scare her off, but she did not relent.

"I still remember when my cousin brother threatened me, told me to sue him and get my land back. So that's exactly what I did," she says. She was the first woman in the entire area to learn how to ride a moped. So today, people fondly call her 'Scootywali bai.'

"I often tell my story to other women. I tell them that if I can fight for my rights, why can't you?"

(Translated from Marathi to English)



Anagha Pathak is a journalist with more than a decade of experience in the media, currently working with BBC World Service with a particular focus on women issues. In addition, Anagha has worked on international projects such as BBC 100 Women.

AIKA TO THE BAIKA: POLICE COMPLAINT LAVANI

Agents of Ishq
8 March 2020

Bilkul Pandey and Kunti G are two cops who pride themselves on being protectors of women. But when the time comes to Aika To The Baika (Listen to the Women), i.e. the cracks in the pro-woman façade start to show.

As the dazzling Lavani artists Shakku, Megha and Akanksha come in with their complaints of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and parental control over a woman's romantic choices, they confront the gender biases that make justice a faraway thing for women.

In a radically experimental style, set in a police station, Aika to The Baika combines the sharp banter of a Lavani performance to treat a severe subject of gender bias in the legal system with a light and inclusive hand.

The video has been produced in collaboration with the feminist legal centre Majlis, founded in 1991 with a vision to make justice accessible and provide quality legal help to women and children, especially those from vulnerable and marginalized sections, and evolve innovative, feminist legal practices. Over 25 years, the team, headed by Flavia Agnes, has worked with over 50,000 women.

The song lyrics drew from the experiences of these lawyers in their encounters with the justice system. During the pandemic, violence against women, especially in the home, has become a significant and persistent social concern. The video highlighted how gender biases could pervert justice at the entry point, preventing women from seeking justice and keeping them in unsafe situations.

This video's primary purpose was to be used in police training sessions by Majlis for the gender sensitization of cops. It attempts to address the societal biases that may come from a policeman handling gender-sensitive complaints correctly. The video, which hit more than 1.7 million (17 lakh or 17,08,000 views) on Facebook, generated an intense

discussion around these issues. Several organizations working with legal counsel and restorative justice and gender issues have also been using the video.



Agents of Ishq is a multimedia project about sex, love and desire. Agents of Ishq is brought to you by Parodevi Pictures, an independent media and art company based in Mumbai.





PRIDE AND BEYOND: THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Media reports have a proven record of using a range of colourful terms and expressions when writing on cases of sexual abuse or stories involving people with different gender identities. Sexually charged, derogatory and disrespectful terms are often used for victims or those whose sexuality does not follow society's norms.

Research shows that the media can play a transformational role in shaping positive attitudes towards sexuality and minorities in general, especially affecting the views of a more impressionable younger population. While the decriminalization of homosexuality has given the media the freedom to discuss, highlight and explore the LGBTQ narratives, activists, journalists, and gender experts still emphasize the need to have more representation of the trans community in the media. The Internet, on the other hand, has created new spaces for social interaction amongst the community. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook have helped increase queer awareness and visibility in India. The stories in this section focus on breaking the silence and prejudices in reporting on LGBTQ issues.

Lachmi Deb Roy, in her article, 'The Rainbow Is At A New High', highlights how different short, regional films and mainstream cinema are breaking the stereotypes attached to the LGBTQIA+ community. Some films depict positive stories about transgender people who faced discrimination becoming police officers. Some describe the love stories between same sex persons to sensitise the audience. Although there are many movies, mainstream cinema still has a long way to go in presenting authentic portrayals of the LGBTQIA+ community.

While the LGBTQ+ community is now more confident to express themselves, grow personally, and own their relationships without the fear of discrimination and harassment, this change has primarily been for the urban, privileged few. On the other hand, the verdict didn't do much to change the situation for transgender people. 'हिजड़ा समाज के भीतर निर्धारित श्रेणीबद्धता' (special edition) by Ina Goel brings forth abject poverty, discrimination that members of the Hijda community usually face in their daily lives. It depicts the different categories in the Hijda community like the Nirvana and the Akwa community who follow a lot of customs. The supernatural powers attached to the Hijda community marginalizes them. It is essential to address the ignorance and fear of the Hijda community among people if we wish to ensure that they get their due and access to mainstream livelihoods and benefits.

The continued use of conversion therapies to "cure" homosexuality by changing people's sexual orientation is a cause for concern. Navamy Sudhish, in his article, 'Shock treatment, exorcism, psychotropic drugs: behind 'conversion therapy' for queers', highlights the painful and cruel practices to 'convert them' into heterosexuals by seeking the services of psychiatrists, sexologists, quacks, doctors, and sometimes even subjecting them to shock therapy. Lack of empathy and support, often by family members, have led some members of the LGBTQAI+ community to commit suicide.

Business Insider's video, 'Inside Kashmir's 'Invisible' Transgender Community', highlights how the community has been discriminated against in Kashmir. Their situation has become even more worrisome due to the abolition of special status to Kashmir under article 370 of the constitution and the pandemic. They have lost jobs, have been ostracized by family members and society and all their traditional roles are being replaced by newer technologies. They are often denied proper burial and are impoverished due to the lack of economic opportunities.

PRINT & WEB MEDIA

THE RAINBOW IS AT A NEW HIGH

Lachmi Deb Roy

22 February 2020, Outlook

When Deepa Mehta's *Fire* was released in 1996, there were protests. They revealed a society that was completely at unrest with the LGBTQ community. Until then, Bollywood and language cinemas portrayed its members in specific stereotypes.

They could be comical, prostitutes, and beggars. But they couldn't be normal, and an inherent part of the society. Less than three decades later, things have changed, albeit not in the manner they should have. Today, you are more likely to watch a *Ladli* (Hindi) or *U Ushacha* (Marathi).

Ladli doesn't just have the third-gender characters. It is a poignant and true story about a transgender by the same name. It is a tale of a person for whom life itself became a journey to find some meaning in this cruel world. She renders tender hopes about being accepted, being part of the society.

Instead, what she gets is harsh treatment and unkind words. She yearns for love, real love, but realizes that it is often coupled with judgmental behavior and conditions. Ironically, when she finds love, it is difficult for her to accept it.

Film-maker Sudipta Kundu became obsessed with *Ladli*, when he saw her brawl with the police on a weekend night. Unlike what he had heard and seen, the encounter was attention-grabbing. "She was spontaneous and logical. I tried to discontinue the fight," he reminisces. Later, he asked the local paan-shop owner about the cause of the fight. He was told that it was a regular fight for her survival. He was advised not to be involved. But the brawl and comments left Kundu in deep thought over the next few days.

Initially, the film director planned to do a photo-shoot to depict *Ladli*'s life through photographs. But as he explored her life, she understood the

cruelties and sensitivities involved, he figured out a documentary film was the best option to show it like it was. Given the existing stereotypes in Indian films, Kundu felt that this was a medium that had to be explored. "In the 1990s, a few efforts were made, like Tamanna, but films on the community were few," he explains in an exclusive interview.

Today, people like Rohan Parashuram Kanawade, who made the short film *Ushacha*, don't just portray a community member as the main protagonist. What they add is a sketch of how they are as normal as heterosexuals, possess the same emotions, feelings, and yearnings, and how society still views them. The Marathi film, for instance, is about an illiterate single mother in rural Maharashtra, who feels drawn to the female teacher of a local primary school. Like others in love, the attraction is innocent and pure, and empowers her. She was like any other next-door neighbor.

Kanawade was careful to stay away from popular, and wrong, perceptions that exist among heterosexuals. It is these kinds of portrayals in our films that make the audience think that "gay man means a feminine man, and lesbian implies a butch woman". At a personal level, when he came out, some of his friends couldn't believe it. They said that he didn't look like a gay. This is why he steered away from stereotypes, and attempted to normalize the community in this, and other films he made.

"Since I made *Usha*, a large number of heterosexual viewers told me that they didn't want the film to end. In fact, they wanted to see the love to bloom between the two lead women," explains Kanawade. Many advised him that he should convert it into a full-fledged feature film. This was an achievement of sorts, a successful attempt to change the existing mindset. More importantly, it made the audience feel that the community members were just like any other human beings. They harbored the same hopes, ambitions, and aspirations.

Sundar (Beautiful) is another short film made by Kanawade. The story deals with a boy, Jayu, and is set in a chawl in Mumbai.

On the last day of the Navaratri festival, the young hero listens to the dandiya music that makes him restless. His heart sinks as he sees the girls dolled up for the night. Everyone is heading to the ground to dance.. Jayu takes too long to go, but his mother doesn't want him to step out of the house. She was embarrassed; the year before, her son had dressed in a sari for a fancy-dress competition. Jayu, however, went for the dance.

Onlookers laughed, mocked, and whistled at him. For them, this was another reason to ridicule the little boy, to make fun of him. But Jayu did not care. He wanted to live life that way he wished, and seek personal happiness. That is, until he spots his mother among the hecklers. Still, Sundar is a tale of millions of people in this country, who despite being shunned by the majority, realize their inner beauty, accept their internal truths, and move on happily with their lives.

The above-mentioned movies, and several others, were showcased at KASHISH, the annual International Queer Film Festival, which is the largest in South Asia and is held in Mumbai. It deals with the LGBTQIA+ community that comprises lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, gender queer, queer, inter-sexed, a-gender, asexual, and allied sections. Every year the festival screens around 16 -80 films from 35 to 40 countries. Out of these films, 30 to 35 were from India in the past three years.

Sridhar Rangayan, writer and director of award-winning LGBTQ-themed films, and festival director of KASHISH, elaborates, "In 2019, we screened two diverse and distinct films about transgenders. One from Kolkata, Nagarkirtan, was directed by Kaushik Ganguly. It was about a beautiful romance between a flute player and young transgender person. It also dealt with the sensitive topic of in-fighting within the Hijra community." The second was a Malayalam one, Njan Marykutty. It was about a transgender who faces discrimination from family and society, but becomes a police officer."

Regional films are the real game changers. Naanu Avanalla Avalu in Kannada won two National Awards. Khejdi is a film set in Rajasthan, and starred the popular actor, Ashish Sharma. Of course, there are the unforgettable movies by the late Rituparno Ghosh – Arekti Premer Golpo and Chitrangada, both in Bengali. Both of them deal with the lives of the transgenders with sensitivity. Whether it was deliberate or not, they were instrumental in evoking insightful realizations among their audiences.

Apart from these, a number of short films and documentaries explored the community's need for family acceptance, housing, jobs and love. A Monsoon Date, which is directed by Tanuja Chandra, and stars Konkana Sen Sharma, exposes the stigma faced by transgender persons when they are looking for a loving partner. Another young filmmaker who has

consistently made LGBTQ-themed films is Onir. His *My Brother Nikhil* and *I Am* not only won awards, but stole the hearts of the viewers. *Shab*, another of Onir's movies, includes one of the most beautiful gay characters seen in Indian cinema.

But the spectrum needs to expand. Sridhar explains, "Also, the conversations have moved beyond the more visible trans-women to include stories about trans-men, intersex persons, gender queer/non-binary persons who fall under the umbrella of transgender currently. But their issues and lives are different and distinct, and we need more such stories to be told. That's why the 11th edition of KASHISH had the theme, 'Moving Forward, Together', focused on the marginalized within the overall LGBTQIA+."

After Section 377 was decriminalized in September 2018, film makers seem to feel a sense of freedom to explore narratives with more nuanced stories. In early 2019, two films were released. *Evening Shadows* by Sridhar Rangayan was about a mother-son bond that is put to test when he tells her that he is gay, and the hardships she faces to accept him. *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* by Shelly Chopra Dhar starred Sonam Kapoor in a lesbian relationship. A soon-to-be-released Ayushman Khurana starrer, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, promises to be a mainstream gay film.

The other development is the digital web series space, where one can tell stories that are on the cutting edge. Series like *Romil and Jugal*, *Four More Shots* and *Made in Heaven* have LGBTQ characters in the lead roles, and have proven to be game-changers. Still, on-the-ground changes are needed for the movement to take off. The first is the lack of finances to support LGBTQ films. There are no government grants, nor are there private funds. The film makers rely on their own funds, or their friends', or seek crowd-funding. Says Sridhar, "What we need are funds dedicated to LGBTQ stories." He confidently adds, "The mood is upbeat, and the rainbow is flying high. What it needs is the backing of commerce and platforms like KASHISH to break through the barrier." And, of course, there is a need for a sensitive and sensitized audience that can appreciate the new narratives. Mass entertainment is a sure-fire way to change thinking and mindset.

TANUJA CHANDRA'S INTERVIEW

A conversation with Tanuja Chandra, whose film, *The Monsoon Date*, chronicles the identity crisis of LGBTQ community.

In the film, how did you make an effort to approach it in a sensitive manner?

I would say it was more a 'natural' effort than a conscious one because I have always felt strongly and unshakably about human rights. I am a feminist and have spoken about women in film and the 'female genre' since the beginning of my career. This, is an extension of those values. I believe in the absolute and equal rights of people from the LGBTQ community. I believe there should be no manner of discrimination against them in society and stories of course, form an important part of the world we live in. When my friend and writer, Gazal Dhaliwal, and I discussed the seed of this story, there wasn't a doubt about how we would approach the subject of someone who has struggled with their identity and sexuality. And when Konkona Sen Sharma came on board, this intent gained a compatriot and fellow believer. The reason I use words that imply some sort of revolution is because that's exactly what's needed. In an equal and just world, we wouldn't have to bother, but until that happens, the 'conscious effort' you speak of, is direly needed.

Your take on how new film makers have changed their approach?

Films reflect social attitudes but they can point out social ills, they can inspire, films can bring about empathy, and if we're lucky, films might shine an unblinking light on long-held untruths and free us of their stranglehold. An oppressed community needs to have not just a presence in mainstream storytelling but also the world's increased awareness of its suffering and the injustices it has had to endure. Only when we as a culture truly respect the rights of queer minorities and regard them with humaneness, will it truly make us a more just nation. And then only will our stories thrive.

From Deepa Mehta in 1996, we have come a long way. Why did it take so long?

Sadly, cultures are not quick to change. I feel ever since I started out, I've been repeating myself on the topic of women in film on and off-screen and female-led stories. And change has been painfully slow. Even today, just a handful of films are made that center around women, and the number of female directors is still small. And yet, is there an option but to keep at it. We must have our voices heard over and over again, every day, all the time.

How has the approach toward LGBTQ changed in films?

From the time I made my first film, at least one can tell a story now without necessarily having a male hero in it, or a love story inserted in it. A female star can get a film funded, although I must say, not nearly as massively funded as a male star. Nevertheless, a filmmaker need not cast a known male actor in a 'Special Appearance' anymore. While one does see queer characters peppering shows on the web, mainstream cinema largely remains wary of gay and lesbian love stories. How far is the day when the average Friday will have queer stories releases with regularity – very far, I would say.



Lachmi Deb Roy is working with Outlook magazine and web. She presently holds the position of Assistant Editor, covering art, culture, food, and entertainment. She has won the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity for 2020.

हिजड़ा समाज के भीतर निर्धारित श्रेणीबद्धता

इना गोयल

8 जनवरी 2020, हिंदी प्रिंट डाइजेस्ट इंग्लैण्ड

(यह लेख हिजड़ा समुदाय पर शोध करते हुए इस बात को समझने का प्रयास है कि हिजड़ों की भूमिका पर अपना मत रखने के क्या अर्थ हैं और हिजड़ा बनने की प्रक्रियाएँ क्या हैं। यह अध्ययन दिल्ली, भारत, में रहने वाले हिजड़ा समुदाय के नृजातीय अध्ययन पर आधारित है और सामाजिक अंग के रूप में हिजड़ा समुदाय के जन्म का अन्वेषण करता है। समाज में प्रचलित अनेक तरह के पूर्वाग्रहों और असहिष्णुताओं के कारण हिजड़ा समुदाय हमेशा से समाज के हाशिए पर घोर गरीबी में जीवन व्यतीत करता रहा है, जिसे सामान्य जीवन की सभी प्रक्रियाओं से बाहर रखा गया। इस समुदाय की समस्याओं को समझने में सबसे बड़ी बाधा इस समूह की अपने को 'गोपनीय' बनाये रखने की है। इनके सामाजिक बहिष्कार को देखते हुए यह लेख अस्मिता की राजनीति और सामाजिक भेदभाव के पुनरुत्पादन के बीच अंतर्संबंधों की तलाश करता है जो मौजूदा वर्ग, लिंग, यौनिकता आदि की विषमताओं और गैरबराबरी का कारण हैं।

एक सामाजिक संस्था के रूप में हिजड़ों का जन्म

भारत में हिजड़ा समुदाय सामाजिक-धार्मिक आधार पर अलग लैंगिक पहचान वाले लोगों का विशेष समुदाय है! भारत, जहाँ यौनिकता प्रायः 'पवित्रता', 'शुद्धता', 'अधीनता', 'सांस्कृतिक दंभ' यहाँ तक कि 'राष्ट्रीय अस्मिता' और 'राष्ट्र-राज्य' से संबंध रखती है (चंदीरमनी एंड बेरी)! औपनिवेशिक शासन (ब्रिटिश रूल) के दौरान हिजड़ा समुदाय को 'आपराधिक-जनजाति अधिनियम (सीटीए) 1871' के तहत 'आपराधिक-जनजाति' घोषित किया गया। कालांतर में हालाँकि इस कानून को निरस्त (1952) कर दिया गया लेकिन इसके बावजूद समाज की सामूहिक चेतना में हिजड़ा समुदाय अछूत और यहाँ तक की अमानवीय बना रहा।

भारत के हिजड़ा समुदाय के अंतर्गत बहुत से हिजड़े ऐसे होते हैं जो बधियाकरण के पारंपरिक अनुष्ठान से नहीं गुजरते, वे स्वयं की पहचान 'अकवा हिजड़ा' के रूप में करते हैं अर्थात् जो पुरुष जननांग रखते हैं वह भी हिजड़ा समुदाय में स्थान प्राप्त करता है। वह हिजड़े जो बधियाकरण की प्रक्रिया से गुजरते हैं वे स्वयं की पहचान 'निर्वाणा हिजड़ा' के रूप में करते हैं। इस अनुष्ठान के तहत अंडकोष तथा लिंग दोनों को निकाल दिया जाता है। जो हिजड़े बधियाकरण की प्रक्रिया से गुजर चुके होते हैं वे हिजड़ा समाज के अंदर सम्मान की नज़रों से

देखे जाते हैं क्योंकि उनका मानना है कि बधिया होने का मतलब है उन्होंने सांसारिक सुखों का त्याग कर दिया। शरीर में किया जा रहा यह फेरबदल, लिंग परिवर्तन ऑपरेशन में आने वाले अत्यधिक खर्च के कारण सामान्यतः बिना किसी अधिकृत चिकित्सीय सहयोग के किया जाता है। हिजड़ा समुदाय के भीतर इस तरह के अनुष्ठानों को करवाने वाले स्थानीय चिकित्सकों के ठिकानों के बारे में अत्यधिक गोपनीयता बरती जाती है।

आजीविका के सीमित विकल्प हिजड़ों के स्वरोजगार हेतु बाध्य होने का प्रमुख कारण है, वह केवल गरीब हैं और उनकी कोई शैक्षणिक पृष्ठभूमि नहीं है जिसका कारण उनका सामाजिक बहिष्कार है (गोयल एंड नायर, 2012)। उनका मुख्य पेशा टोली-बधाई गाना और आशीर्वाद देना है (खान, 2009) जो सभी हिजड़ों के लिए कमाई का एकमात्र ज़रिया है क्योंकि उनको निःसंतान दम्पतियों के लिए सौभाग्यशाली माना जाता है (देखें प्रेस्टन, 1987 : 378)। जीवन-यापन के लिए देह-व्यापार को धनार्जन के अगले बेहतर विकल्प के बतौर देखा जाता है। यह घरों से लेकर सड़कों तक विभिन्न सामाजिक-आर्थिक पृष्ठभूमि से आने वाले पुरुष उपभोक्ताओं के आधार पर फैला हुआ है। जीविका के लिए भीख माँगना आखिरी विकल्प है जिसे हिजड़ा समुदाय के भीतर हेय समझा जाता है।

हिजड़ा समुदाय में प्रवेश के लिए, गुरु द्वारा चले को गोद लेने की परंपरा है जिससे वे चले को घराने की संस्कृतिओं और परम्पराओं से परिचित करा सकें। हिजड़ों के घराने में शामिल होने पर उन्हें महिलाओं के जैसे नए नाम दिए जाते हैं तथा उन्हें हिजड़ा कम्यून (डेरा) में शामिल होने का अधिकार मिल जाता है। यहाँ से एक नयी शुरुआत होती है। हिजड़ों की दुनिया में अभ्यस्त हो जाने के बाद चले घराने में अपना योगदान करते हुए अपनी कमाई से अपना हिस्सा गुरु को देना आरम्भ करते हैं। श्रेणीबद्ध (उच्च व निम्न) होने के बावजूद भी गुरु-चेला संबंध सहजीवी होता है जो समुदाय के भीतर सामाजिक संगठन की आधारशिला है और सामाजिक नियंत्रण की मुख्य संस्था के रूप में कार्य करता है। एक बार चेला बन जाने के बाद समुदाय की परम्पराओं की किसी भी प्रकार की अवज्ञा किये जाने पर चले को हिजड़ा समाज से बहिष्कृत कर दिया जाता है और उन्हें हिजड़ा समुदाय से जाति बहिष्कृत समझा जाता है। गुरु और चले के संबंधों में कई प्रकार की विविधताएँ हैं। पूर्वी दिल्ली के ललिता पार्क डेरे में रहने वाली मोरनी (बदला हुआ नाम) के अनुसार – “डेरा मेरा परिवार है और मेरा गुरु केवल मेरा संरक्षक नहीं है वह मेरी माँ, भाई, पति और मेरा सब कुछ है।” पूर्वी दिल्ली सीलमपुर एरिया में रहने वाली सलोनी (बदला हुआ नाम) ने गुरु-चेला संबंधों को व्यक्त करते हुए कहा कि “कभी तो गुरु-चेला संबंध माँ-बच्चे की तरह मधुर हुआ करता था लेकिन तुम जानती हो आजकल यह कैसा है। ज़्यादातर इस बात से सहमत हैं कि हमारा संबंध सास-बहू के संबंध

की तरह है कभी खट्टा तो कभी मीठा दोनों है।” चंपा (बदला हुआ नाम), लक्ष्मी नगर डेरे पर रहने वाली वरिष्ठ गुरु की एक चेला हिजड़ा हैं। उनका कहना था “इसके अतिरिक्त हम अपने गुरु से क्या इच्छा रख सकते हैं? हमारा गुरु हमारा रक्षक और मुक्तिदाता है। वे हमें इस क्रूर और निष्ठुर दुनियाँ से बचाते हैं! हमारे पास ऐसा कोई नहीं है जिस पर हम भरोसा कर सकें, अपने परिवार वालों तक पे भी नहीं जिन्होंने हमें पैदा किया, उन्होंने हमारा त्याग कर दिया...”

घरानों के वर्गीकरण की आंतरिक व्यवस्था

हिजड़ा समुदाय के भीतर जो सामाजिक श्रेणियाँ प्रचलित हैं वह हिजड़ा समुदाय के भीतर वर्गीकरण की आन्तरिक व्यवस्था ‘क्रमबद्ध श्रेणी’ पर आधारित है जिसे घराना कहते हैं। दिल्ली में घरानों की जो व्यवस्था मौजूद है वह आरम्भ से ही इस बात में विश्वास रखती है कि उनका उद्भव मुख्य रूप से दो घरानों से हुआ है एक है ‘बादशाहवाला’ और दूसरा है ‘वज़ीरवाला’। ये घराने आगे चलकर चार उप-घरानों में विभाजित हो जाते हैं। ‘बादशाहवाला’ घराने से जो घराने पैदा हुए वह इस प्रकार हैं – सुजानी घराना और राय घराना। ‘वज़ीरवाला’ के अंतर्गत जिन घरानों का उद्भव हुआ वे हैं – कल्याणी घराना और मंडी घराना। हालाँकि हिजड़ा घराने के नामों के मायने और घरानों की सामाजिक स्थिति में कोई व्यावहारिक समानता नहीं है, यह मात्र एक खास तरह की शक्तियों का विभाजन है जो शायद हिजड़ा घरानों के बीच मौजूद हो। मेरे अपने अध्ययन के संबंध में उच्च श्रेणीबद्धता पर आधारित इन घरानों का वर्गीकरण हिजड़ा समुदाय के भीतर मौजूद सामाजिक व्यवस्था को बनाये रखने का काम करती है। इस प्रकार की संरचनाएं हो सकता है हिजड़ा समुदाय के भीतर कई स्तर पर मौजूद सामाजिक श्रेणीओं को नियंत्रित करने का एक माध्यम हो जो हिजड़ा समुदाय को लम्बे समय से एक सांस्कृतिक परियोजना के बतौर शासित करती रही है।

निष्कर्ष

हिजड़े अपने समाज के भीतर निर्धारित श्रेणीबद्धता को अन्तः सांस्कृतिक रिवाजों के तहत बनाए रखते हैं जो उन्हें एक बंद सामाजिक समूह बनाता है। शरीर एक सामाजिक निर्मिति है और हर व्यक्ति उसका अपना-अपना अर्थ लेते हैं और ऐसा ही हिजड़ा समुदाय के लोग भी अपने शरीर के साथ करते हैं। अपनी स्वीकार्यता के क्रम में हिजड़ों द्वारा अपने शरीर में किया जाने वाला फेरबदल इस बात को दर्शाता है कि किस प्रकार उनकी शारीरिक प्रतीकात्मकता समाज की इच्छाओं की पूर्ति में लगी हुई है। एक ऐसे देश में जहाँ समलैंगिकता को अभी भी ‘अप्राकृतिक’ और ‘बीमारी’ माना जाता है, निःसंदेह भारत में इस समुदाय को बीमारों की तरह देखा जाता है।

हिजड़ा समुदाय के बहिष्कार नतीजा यह हुआ है कि जो लोग अपनी पहचान को समुदाय के साथ जोड़कर देखते हैं वो विषमलैंगिक मानकता से लड़ने, लिंग, यौनिकता और शरीर को समझने की बजाय, समाज में मौजूद जटिलता का ही अवतारीकरण करने लगते हैं। यह 'अन्यकरण' की प्रक्रिया को ही बढ़ावा देता है। हिजड़ों को जो अलौकिक पौराणिक दर्जा दिया गया है वह उन्हें हाशिए पर ही ले जाने का काम करता है। हिजड़ा समुदाय के इर्द-गिर्द बने रहस्यलोक को उन कल्याणकारी योजनाओं के लिए, जो हो सकता है उनकी जरूरतों को शामिल कर लें, हटाना बहुत आवश्यक है! हिजड़ा समुदाय की वास्तविकता और उनके बारे में जनता के बीच फैली सामान्य जानकारी में बहुत अंतर है; यह अलगाव एक समस्या है। हिजड़ा समुदाय के विरुद्ध होने वाले भेदभाव ने उन्हें असमानता से चालित भिन्नाओं में जीवित रहने और भूमिगत समाज बनाने को मजबूर कर दिया है। मेरे अध्ययन का उद्देश्य इस बात को प्रकाश में लाना था कि अजैविक रक्त संबंधों पर आधारित हिजड़ों की सामाजिक गोपनीयता उनके लिए संदिग्ध हो चुकी है, यह गोपनीयता दिल्ली के हिजड़ा समुदाय के सामाजिक अस्तित्व का सामान्य मानक बन चुकी है।

इस लेख का एक विस्तृत रूपांतरण मूल रूप से गोरखपुर न्यूलाइन में प्रकाशित हुआ था।



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SHOCK TREATMENT, EXORCISM, PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS: BEHIND 'CONVERSION THERAPY' FOR QUEERS

Navamy Sudhish

28 June 2020, The Hindu

Rihaan* came out to his parents in the summer of 2008 — three days after they created a profile for him on a matrimonial site. His conservative upper-class family in Pune reacted badly. There was confusion, rage, tears. “My father begged me to meet a psychiatrist, who instantly diagnosed my ‘condition’ as mother-fixation.” Rihaan’s ‘treatment’ started the same week. First it was coercion and counselling; then he was given medicines and dragged to brothels.

“Then came the final sitting to ‘reverse my orientation and cure the disorder’. I was locked into a room wallpapered with pictures of nude men and they gave me some injections that made me throw up. I retched the entire day, collapsing in between, then waking up covered in vomit. Two days later the session was repeated and I was shown gay porn.” Within a couple of weeks Rihaan was a defeated man. “Panic rose in my chest even at the mention of same-sex attraction. My parents were summoned and officially informed that my ‘conversion’ was complete. I lived like a zombie those days. I was heavily dependent on medicines and each time I tried to stop, I was ravaged by withdrawal symptoms. I contemplated suicide. Then, before I knew it, I was married to a cis woman.”

Rihaan’s marriage lasted five months, but more than 10 years later, he still gets panic attacks. He has no career or confidence. “I am unable to have a meaningful relationship and at times the shame and pain are unbearable,” he says. Now, Rihaan is finally on the road to recovery.

Not everyone is so lucky. Anjana Harish, the 21-year-old queer student from Kerala who was found dead in Goa last month, was also subjected to conversion therapy. Her friends say that Harish live-streamed a video revealing the torture she had to endure from pseudo-therapists. Disturbingly, it looks like the discredited concept of conversion therapy is still being practised. Claiming to “cure” queerness, it can involve

everything from shock treatment to exorcism and hormones to psychotropic drugs and kindling a sense of shame. According to medical experts, it causes irreparable damage to the mental health of victims.

Members of the LGBTQIA+ community say conversion therapy is practised in stealth. The 'patients' are taken to psychiatric wards in hospitals or de-addiction centres with falsified files. When Jay*, a trans man from Ahmedabad, consulted a psychiatrist at a government facility for sex reassignment surgery, the doctor insisted that he go through conversion therapy first. "I am a 43-year-old gazetted officer and I went there with some community members. If they could try to coerce me, think about what they must do to younger people with no support," says Jay.

Quacks and clerics

This so-called 'therapy' is dished out not just by unscrupulous health professionals but also by preachers, naturopaths, shamans, and religious establishments. When Marie* told her parents in Coimbatore that she was a trans woman, they asked her to attend a course at an ashram the family used to frequent. "On the second day of the course, I woke up in another place where I was held prisoner for two months," she says. "I was slapped, body-shamed and sexually abused for being a 'sinner' and acting against the 'divine plan'." Realising there was no point in fighting, Marie stopped reacting and convinced them that she had changed. "I was sent home where I continued the charade for two more months. At the very first opportunity, I fled and never went back." Marie has since undergone sex reassignment surgery and works as a doctor in a hill station where nobody knows her past. "I survived because I stayed vigilant from the beginning. Once they break your spirit, there is no going back."

Salma's* relationship with another girl became a scandal that rocked her hometown in Lucknow. It was a cleric who advised the family to keep her in isolation; she was raped multiple times by a close relative, a man she called kaka (uncle). In India, religious institutions and representatives play a big part in promoting conversion therapy. In the West, groups like Exodus International openly promoted conversion therapy across nearly 20 countries, but it has been more hush-hush here, with saints, pastors and babas doing it on the sly. Organised groups operate as de-addiction centres, prayer groups or ashrams.

Unlawful practice

"We condemn conversion therapy. It's unlawful," says P.K. Dalal, President, Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS). IPS has taken a strong stand against it. "We have a protocol when it comes to such cases and we will soon be coming out with a statement," says Prof. Dalal.

Although there is no specific law prohibiting conversion therapy, legal experts emphasise that the practice violates the Right to Privacy enshrined under Article 21. "If sexual abuse is involved it's an IPC offence anyway and now we have the Mental Healthcare Act 2017 that gives a lot of agency to individuals," says Sandhya Raju, an advocate at Kerala High Court and part of the Human Rights Law Network. "Once mental health review boards are constituted as part of enforcing the law, the community can use it to protect their rights."

If the practice is used against children below 18, the law is even more stringent. Parents can be booked under Section 75 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. Priji P.K., president of the Thiruvananthapuram-based Queerythm, which operates a 24x7 helpline for LGBTQIA+ people, says, "Very often parents are involved, and doctors claim the treatment is for depression or schizophrenia." He thinks new legislation is needed to address the issue. "While trans persons are protected under the NALSA judgment, other segments — including gays, lesbians and bisexuals — have no legal support. Same sex marriages are still not legal in India. We talk about inclusivity and awareness, but legal backing is very important to achieve that goal. When the discrimination ends, the rest will follow," he says.

While most such practitioners are quacks, there are some who strongly believe they are offering a 'service'. A Kerala-based psychiatrist who practises conversion therapy said, on condition of anonymity, that his patients "undergo the treatment willingly" as it's "easier to live as a heterosexual individual". According to him, many of his patients now have a family and children. But even he admits that many of them come back due to marital discord and are on endless medication for depression.

A Hyderabad-based sexologist is equally confident. He offers different programmes tailored to 'the severity of queerness' and says, "You can fix most homosexuals with hormone therapy. Psychiatric interventions have been successful in most cases I've treated. For example, testosterone

injections can reverse same-sex desire to a great extent while some people respond to behavioural therapy.” He refuses to share his methods and says sexual deviance often springs from childhood sexual abuse and conditioning. He believes he is “helping” queer people by “reaffirming their real orientation or gender identity, making them acceptable, and protecting the honour of their families.”

Hypnotic ‘cure’

The origins of this clandestine practice date back to the 19th century, when ‘deviant’ sexual orientations were considered sinful or criminal. One of the first documented cases comes from the accounts of Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, a German physician who reportedly used hypnosis to ‘cure’ homosexuality in the 1890s. By the early 1900s, practitioners worldwide began to use hypnosis as well as electroconvulsive therapy and sometimes surgical procedures like lobotomy. People were tortured, castrated and subjected to sordid corrective measures. Aversion therapy, of the kind Rihaan underwent, was portrayed in Stanley Kubrick’s 1971 film *A Clockwork Orange*.

In India, the Department of Psychiatry at AIIMS, New Delhi, conducted a study to reverse sexual orientation between 1977 and 1982. The subjects were six homosexual people, who were administered electric shocks using an aversion therapy apparatus set at 50 volts to control their homoerotic fantasies. The report claimed that four persons were successfully reoriented. By the 2000s, several doctors and healers had popped up across the country.

In May this year, the UN published a report cataloguing the severe and everlasting impacts of conversion therapy. The report says, “Attempts to pathologize and erase the identity of individuals, negate their existence as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or gender diverse and provoke self-loathing have profound consequences on their physical and psychological integrity and well-being.” It urges governments to ban conversion therapy. So far only five countries — Germany (for under-18), Malta, Ecuador, Brazil, Taiwan — have drawn up bills making it illegal, but efforts are on in other countries too.

At the most basic level, conversion therapy is unethical and a human rights violation. Even after the Supreme Court decriminalised consensual same-sex relationships by striking down Section 377 and came out with the

historic NALSA judgment to protect transgender rights, Indian society is far from queer-friendly: LGBTQIA+ individuals still face violence, hostility and stigma. And a very real threat to their mental and physical health.

*Names changed to protect identity.



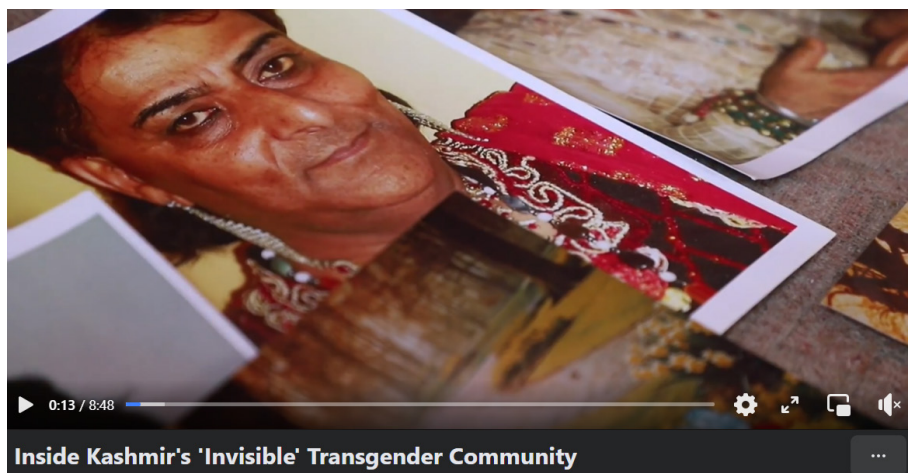
Navamy Sudhish has been a Principal Correspondent with The Hindu for the past few years and covers features mainly focused on the environment, minority issues, and development.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

INSIDE KASHMIR'S INVISIBLE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

Business Insider

16 October 2020



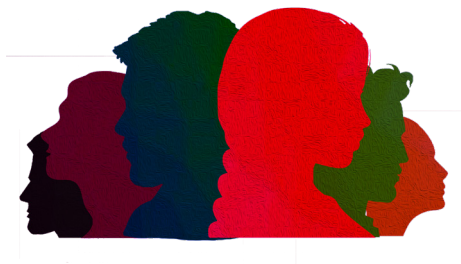
Business Insider's video, 'Inside Kashmir's 'Invisible' Transgender Community', highlights how the transgender community has been discriminated against. Their situation has become even more worrisome due to the abolition of 370 and the pandemic. As a result, they have lost jobs where they danced and sang during marriages with people more inclined to DJ's and female singers. Traditionally, the transgender communities in Kashmir played the roles of matchmakers, but with matrimonial websites and online partner search apps, this profession has come to a halt. They have been pushed to sex trade. Moreover, they are often denied proper burial and are ostracised by family members and society, often subjected to poverty due to the lack of economic opportunities. They have to lead an invisible life all throughout their lives. Only few are lucky who can identify themselves as LGBT communities. Sex and sexual orientation are taboo subjects in Kashmir. Transgenders here,

fear to dress in colourful dresses, fearing that they might get ridiculed by the society. Transgenders face discrimination, get ridiculed, they don't have any freedom for choosing their gender. Few are lucky, but voices of many get subdued.



Business Insider (BI) is an American financial and business news website founded in 2007. Since 2015, a majority stake in Business Insider's parent company Insider Inc. has been owned by the German publishing house Axel Springer. It operates several international editions.





DIGITAL INDIA : THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY

In India, the number of active Internet users is expected to rise by 45% in the next five years to nearly 900 million by 2025 from 622 million, according to the 2020 report by the IAMAI-Kantar ICUBE. However, while connectivity can promote large-scale progress, it also leaves our digital societies open to new vulnerabilities. While the pandemic propelled a 500 per cent increase in telehealth consultations, a structural shift towards online shopping with e-retail reaching 95 per cent of Indian districts and digital payments touching the 100 million transactions per day mark It had also amplified some alarming trends. One of which is the ever-widening digital gap.

Half of India's population lacks internet access, and even if they can get online, only 20% of Indians know how to use digital services, according to government data. Moreover, most families don't own a computer or a smartphone to access the Internet. As a result, the pandemic has further aggravated the country's digital divide – the gap between those with the means and knowledge to use the digital means and those without – worsening the already stark levels of inequality and bringing down economic growth. Stories in this section highlight the good, the bad and the ugly faces of digital India.

In her story, 'महिला विरोधी है ऑनलाइन शिक्षा' featured on feminismindia.com, Heena Fatima, describes the gendered digital divide often being a

triple disadvantage for women in India. First, there is a rural-urban digital divide and secondly there is an income-based digital divide between households. Thirdly, and most importantly, intra-household discrimination prevents women from equitably accessing digital devices within the domestic sphere, which further widens the gender-based digital gap. She describes how this divide reflects the widespread discrimination women and girls face and results from the haphazard and exclusionary penetration of digital access and lack of basic electricity facilities. Fatima reports on how the government claims to have provided electricity to all households in India are unsubstantiated on ground. The picture is anything but rosy with the erratic supply of electricity. She amplifies how the non-availability of electricity and the patriarchal societies restrict and affect equitable access to technology for women and girls. This problem, she states, makes online education the biggest reason for girls dropping out of the educational system.

Another “ticking bomb”, as Sanhati Banerjee describes it in her article, is online child sexual abuse. There has been a sustained growth in online sexual abuse targeting children, which is outstripping the global capacity to respond. Approximately 71 million children aged between 5-11 years in India access the Internet on the devices of their family members, amounting to nearly 14 per cent of the country’s active Internet user base, especially during the lockdown. Sanhati describes how anonymity, secrecy and interconnectedness, have resulted in potential and habitual child sexual offenders, paedophiles, child rapists and child pornography addicts migrating to the Internet during the lockdown, posing a new threat to the safety of children. Featured on feminismindia.com, this article, ‘The ticking Bomb called Online Child Sexual Abuse’ describes how the phrase ‘boys being boys’ for a long time has been considered an excusable part of nature in our society leading to toxic masculinity. Sanhati writes how the lack of informed sex education, stigma, sexualization of children on shows, etc., reinforces sexual harassment. She explains how digital illiteracy and inadequate online safety measures expose children to the hazards of other cyber-crimes like cyberbullying, cyberstalking, identity theft, sexual predation, and Internet addiction.

Just like Sanhati Banerjee, Jyoti Yadav, in her article, ‘Locker Room boys to IT cell men: India’s rape culture grows without shame and consequences’ featured in *The Print*, writes about the infamous Bois Locker Room WhatsApp group incident, comprising young boys from Delhi schools

sharing images of underage girls, with conversations ranging from ‘jokes’ about their private parts to planning a gang rape, which went viral when the country just went into a nationwide lockdown. She also writes about toxic trolling, a new tool by men running the IT cells of political parties, targeting and sexualizing women who don’t agree or adhere to their doctrine. Trolling has become embedded globally in the fabric of political life, especially in India, home to the world’s biggest democracy. Against this backdrop, many women are often subjected to manipulated online posts, a scary trend in a country where fake news can lead to violence. Women’s rights advocates say the large-scale trolling in India could be an additional barrier to improving gender parity in politics in our country. That poses a particularly pressing problem for India, where women are already significantly under-represented in politics. The women who disagree with them are sexualized, slut and body shamed, threatened with rape by the Trolls. This behaviour, Jyoti Yadav writes, is an extension of the same means used by “bois locker room” group members to subjugate women in public spaces.

But, all is not lost in digital India, it has had a long-lasting impact on the way people communicate, providing a platform for those discriminated against and giving a voice to discuss gender, women’s rights, sex, and sexuality, among others. One such platform is Mumbai based Indu. L.Harikumar’s Instagram page which is aptly called ‘Individuality’. With 19.1 k followers, her posts feature gender issues and the importance of consent in a relationship. She highlights the importance of support in relationships and women owning their sexual pleasure using solid graphics and illustrations. In addition, her series #LoveSexAndTech documents gender-based online abuse against women, focusing on creating a space for solidarity. This series uses gripping artwork and words for her audience to document how patriarchy can exercise control over women’s lives.

PRINT & WEB MEDIA

महिला विरोधी है ऑनलाइन शिक्षा

हीना फातिमा

25 जून 2020, फेमिनिज्मइन्डिया.कॉम

24 जून को यूजीसी ने घोषणा की है कि देश भर के उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों और विश्वविद्यालयों में अंतिम वर्ष के छात्रों के लिए कोई परीक्षा नहीं होगी। यूजीसी ने फैसला किया है कि जुलाई में होने वाली वार्षिक परीक्षा के बजाय अब छात्रों को उनके इंटरनल और पूर्व सेमेस्टर प्रदर्शन के आधार पर परिणाम जारी किए जाएंगे। दरअसल पिछले कई महीनों से देशभर में लोग सरकार के ऑनलाइन क्लासिस और एग्जाम कराने के आदेश का विरोध कर रहे हैं। वो सरकार पर शिक्षा का निजीकरण, भेदभाव और सामाजिक बेदखल करने का आरोप लगा रहे हैं।

देशभर में कोरोना के बढ़ते संक्रमण को देखते हुए केंद्र सरकार ने प्राइमरी और उच्च शिक्षा के संस्थानों को ऑनलाइन कक्षाएं लगाने का आदेश दिया था। केंद्रीय मानव संसाधन मंत्री आरपी निशंक ने यह भी कहा था कि 'जो छात्र ग्रामीण इलाकों में रहते हैं और जिनके लिए ऑनलाइन कक्षाएं लेना मुश्किल है उन्हें टीवी के ज़रिए 32 चैनलों के माध्यम से पाठ मुहैया कराए जाएंगे। लेकिन सरकार की यह मुहिम फेल होते नजर आ रही है।

इसी साल 22 जून को असम के चिरांग ज़िले के रहने वाले 16 साल के एक छात्र ने इसलिए खुदकुशी करली क्योंकि उसके पास ऑनलाइन क्लास और एग्जाम में हिस्सा लेने के लिए स्मार्ट फ़ोन नहीं था। इससे पहले 18 जून को केरल के मलप्पुरम जिले में 10वीं क्लास की छात्रा ने इसलिए आत्महत्या करली क्योंकि ऑनलाइन क्लासेस की वजह से उसे काफी मुश्किलों का सामना करना पड़ता था। उसे जो पढ़ाया जाता था वो उसे समझ नहीं आता था। लड़की के परिजनों का कहना है कि वो टीवी के माध्यम से ऑनलाइन क्लासिस किया करती थी और उस दौरान बिजली कट जाने से वो परेशान रहती थी। वो अपने पिता से स्मार्टफोन दिलाने की मांग भी कर रही थी लेकिन लॉकडाउन में काम छिन जाने की वजह से उसके पिता उसे फोन नहीं दिला सके। वहीं, 2 जून को भी केरल में ही ऑनलाइन क्लासिस में भाग ना ले पाने की वजह से एक और 10वीं कक्षा की छात्रा ने खुदकुशी करली थी। इन घटनाओं के बाद देश में ऑनलाइन एजुकेशन के स्वरूप और बुनियादी ढांचे को लेकर कई सवाल खड़े हो

जाते हैं। सवाल यह भी है कि क्या सरकार के लिए देश में ई शिक्षा को लागू करना आसान है? बिजली और संसाधन की अव्यवस्था में ई शिक्षा की कोरी कल्पना घरों में बिजली प्रदान करने वाली सरकारी योजना सौभाग्य से पता चलता है कि भारत के लगभग 99.9 फ्रीसद घरों में बिजली कनेक्शन है लेकिन हम बिजली की गुणवत्ता और हर घंटे बिजली उपलब्ध होने वाले घंटों को देखें तो हालात बहुत ही खराब नजर आते हैं। ग्रामीण विकास मंत्रालय की तरफ से साल 2017-2018 में मिशन अंत्योदय के तहत देशभर के गांवों में की गई रिसर्च से पता चलता है कि भारत के 16 फ्रीसद घरों में रोजाना एक से आठ घंटे बिजली मिलती है, 33 फ्रीसद को 9-12 घंटे बिजली मिलती है और सिर्फ 47 फ्रीसद को ही दिन में 12 घंटे से अधिक बिजली मिलती है। उधर, इसी साल मई में भारत ने केंद्र शासित प्रदेशों में सभी बिजली वितरण कंपनियों (डिस्कॉम) का निजीकरण करने का ऐलान किया था, जिसकी जानकारी उद्योग के मुख्य कार्यकारी अधिकारियों के साथ डिजिटल बातचीत में बिजली मंत्री राज कुमार सिंह ने दी थी।

17 अप्रैल को बिजली वितरण प्रणाली को निजी हाथों में सौंपने के लिए बिजली संशोधन बिल- 2020 का ड्राफ्ट जारी कर दिया। इस निजीकरण के खिलाफ इलेक्ट्रिक वर्कर यूनियन ने 1 जून को देशव्यापी प्रदर्शन किया। उनका कहना था कि इससे सब्सिडी और क्रॉस सब्सिडी खत्म हो जाएगी। बिजली के दाम और बढ़ेंगे और गरीब उपभोक्ता और किसानों की पहुंच से बिजली बाहर हो जाएगी। वहीं, वित्त मंत्री निर्मला सीतारमण ने मुश्किल हालातों से गुजर रहीं राज्यों की पावर जनरेटिंग कंपनियों को बढ़ावा देने के लिए 90,000 करोड़ रुपए देने का ऐलान किया।

बिजली कंपनियां पहले से बहुत ज्यादा गहरे संकट में हैं। बिजली कंपनियों का डिस्कॉम पर 94,000 करोड़ रुपए का बकाया है। यानी इस पैकेज के बावजूद डिस्कॉम करीब चार हजार करोड़ रुपए के घाटे में रहेंगी। लेकिन कुछ अर्थशास्त्रियों मानना है कि सरकार ने जिस 90 हजार करोड़ रुपए के पैकेज की घोषणा की है वो थोड़ा ज्यादा है। उनका कहना है कि निजी और सरकारी कंपनियां विभिन्न कारणों से नुकसान कर रही हैं। लेकिन इनमें से ज्यादातर सरकारी कंपनियां हैं और निजी कंपनियां भी बड़ी हैं इसलिए वो थोड़े समय के लिए ये बोझ सह सकती हैं।

भारत में कहा जा रहा है कि यहां के एजुकेशन का मौजूदा ढांचा बदल कर उसकी जगह ऑनलाइन सिस्टम को लाया जा रहा है।

झारखंड के पलामू जिले की दिव्या बताती हैं कि यहां शहरी इलाको के मुकाबले ग्रामीण इलाको में बिजली की दिक्रत आसानी से देखने को मिल जाती है। शहरों में 18 से 20 घंटे बिजली आती है वहीं ग्रामीण इलाकों में 10 से 15 घंटे बिजली आती है। वो कहती हैं कि 'लोग ग्रामीण इलाकों में अभी भी सोलर एनर्जी का इस्तेमाल करते हैं यहां तक कि अपना फोन चार्ज करने के लिए वो इस पर ही निर्भर हैं।' दिल्ली यूनिवर्सिटी में एसिसटेंट प्रोफेसर जितेंद्र मीणा कहते हैं कि ग्रामीण इलाको में ऑनलाइन शिक्षा मुमकिन ही नहीं है क्योंकि वहां बिजली आने का समय निर्धारित नहीं है। वहां कभी सुबह, शाम या रात में बिजली आती है ऐसे में जिस हफ्ते बिजली रात में आएगी तब वहां बच्चों के लिए डिजिटल शिक्षा हासिल करने कैसे आसान होगा? भले ही सरकार इस बात के दावे करे की हर घर में बिजली पहुंच गई है लेकिन यह हकीकत नहीं है।

और पढ़ें : 'प्रवासी' क्या इस देश के वासी हैं ?

नेशनल सेंपल सर्वे की साल 2017-18 में शिक्षा पर की गई रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक सिर्फ 24 फ्रीसद घरों में इंटरनेट की सहूलियत है। जबकि भारत की 66 फ्रीसद आबादी गांव में रहती है, केवल 15 फ्रीसद से ज़्यादा ग्रामीण घरों में इंटरनेट सेवा पहुंच रही है। उधर शहरी परिवारों में यह आंकड़ा 42 फ्रीसद है। राज्यों के स्तर पर देखें तो मालूम होता है कि जिन घरों में सिर्फ एक कंप्यूटर है उनका आंकड़ा बिहार में 4.6 फ्रीसद, केरल में 23.5 फ्रीसद और दिल्ली में 35 फ्रीसद है। इंटरनेट के उपयोग के मामले में फर्क साफ देखने को मिलता है। दिल्ली, केरल, हिमाचल प्रदेश, हरियाणा, पंजाब और उत्तराखंड जैसे राज्यों में 40 फ्रीसद से अधिक घरों में इंटरनेट का इस्तेमाल होता है। ओडिशा, आंध्र प्रदेश, असम, बिहार, छत्तीसगढ़, झारखंड, मध्य प्रदेश और पश्चिम बंगाल में यह आंकड़ा 20 फ्रीसद से भी कम है।

महिला विरोधी है ये ऑनलाइन शिक्षा

इंटरनेट एंड मोबाइल एसोसिएशन ऑफ इंडिया 2019 की एक रिपोर्ट बताती है कि 67 फ्रीसद पुरुष और महज 33 फ्रीसद महिलाएं ही इंटरनेट का इस्तेमाल कर पाते हैं। यह असमानता ग्रामीण इलाकों में ज़्यादा देखने को मिलती है, जहां यह आंकड़ा पुरुषों में 72 फ्रीसद और महिलाओं में 28 फ्रीसद है। जेंडर इंडेक्स रिपोर्ट 2020 के मुताबिक भारत में लिंग समानता दुनिया में सबसे खराब है। महिलाओं की आर्थिक भागीदारी, शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य और राजनीतिक सशक्तीकरण के उपायों के साथ भारत 153 देशों में से 112 वें स्थान पर है। उधर, लॉकडाउन के दौरान महिलाओं के खिलाफ होने वाले साइबर अपराधों में इज़ाफ़ा देखने को मिला। राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक अप्रैल में महिलाओं के खिलाफ़ हुए

साइबर क्राइम की 54 शिकायतें मिली थी। वहीं, मार्च में यह आंकड़ा 37 और फरवरी में 21 का था। इस तरह की रिपोर्ट के बाद छात्राओं का कहना है कि ऑनलाइन शिक्षा आने के बाद साइबर अपराधों में बढ़ोतरी होगी।

वहीं, दिव्या कहती हैं कि ऐसे समाज में जहां लड़कियों को फोन नहीं दिया जाता वहां ऑनलाइन शिक्षा लागू कर देना महिला विरोधी है। ऑनलाइन एजुकेशन को बढ़ावा देकर उसमें महिलाओं को शिक्षा से बाहर किया जा रहा है। वो बताती हैं कि अगर परिवार में लड़के या लड़की में से किसी एक को फोन या साधन देने की बात आएगी तो वो सबसे पहले लड़के को दिया जाएगा। मीणा कहते हैं कि हमारी मौजूदा शिक्षा प्रणाली मौका देती है कि हम दूसरे तबकों से संबंध बना सकें और उनकी संस्कृति को जानने का मौका देती है। इसका काफी फायदा लड़कियां को मिल रहा था। वो मौजूदा शिक्षा प्रणाली के जरिए घरों से बाहर निकल रही थी और आसपास की चीजों के बारे में मालूमात हासिल कर रही थी लेकिन ऑनलाइन एजुकेशन आने के बाद यह सब बदल जाएगा। इसके बाद लड़कियां फिर से अपने घरों में कैद हो जाएंगी और मिलने जुलने और जानने की जिज्ञासा खत्म हो जाएगी। इसके माध्यम से महिलाओं की आजादी पर भी हमला किया जा रहा है।

साथ ही, पढ़ाई करने के लिए एक अनुकूल वातावरण की जरूरत होती है। लेकिन सभी छात्रों के पास घर पर पढ़ने-लिखने के लिए एक शांत स्थान नहीं है। एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक भारत में 37 फ्रीसद घरों में एक ही कमरा है। इससे साबित होता है कि यह कई लोगों के लिए इस अव्यवस्था में ऑनलाइन एजुकेशन लेना लक्जरी होगा। इस वक्त जहां लाखों मजदूर अपनों बच्चों के साथ सड़कों पर निकल कर अपने घर पहुँचे हैं या पहुँचने वाले हैं उनके लिए कामकाज छिन जाने के बाद ऑनलाइन शिक्षा को अपनाना बहुत मुश्किल होगा।

मीणा बताते हैं कि दिक्कत यह है कि सरकार परीक्षा के नाम पर ऑनलाइन एजुकेशन सिस्टम ला रही है। परीक्षा कराने के लिए हमारे पास विकल्प है। जैसे महाराष्ट्र और हैदराबाद की यूनिवर्सिटीज परीक्षा को लेकर जो कदम उठा रही है वो सरकार भी कर सकती है। इन यूनिवर्सिटीज ने छात्रों को उनके इंटरनल नम्बर के आधार पर प्रमोट करने की बात की है। दूसरा विकल्प है कि पिछले जो सेमेस्टर हुए हैं उनके मार्क्स के आधार पर एवरेज निकाला जाए और छात्रों को प्रमोट किया जाए। तीसरा विकल्प है कि इंटरनल और सेमेस्टर को मिलाकर छात्रों के एवरेज मार्क्स के आधार पर उन्हें अगली क्लास के लिए भेजा जाए। लेकिन यह एक समय-सीमा के तहत करना होगा, जो कि मुमकिन है। भारत में कहा जा रहा है कि यहां के एजुकेशन का मौजूदा ढांचा बदल कर उसकी जगह ऑनलाइन सिस्टम को लाया

जा रहा है। इसके तहत यहां सिर्फ बच्चों को भर्ती करना ही टारगेट रह जाएगा। लेकिन उसका नतीजा क्या होगा सरकार को इस बारे में सुध ही नहीं है।



Heena Fatima is presently employed at The Print as a Correspondent cum Sub Editor. Heena has reported on varied issues like gender, politics and development. It's her wish to give voice to the last person standing on the margins of society through her reporting.

THE TICKING BOMB CALLED ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Sanhati Banerjee

12 June 2020, feminisminindia.com

According to a recent report by non-profit organisation (NGO) India Child Protection Fund (ICPF), consumption of child pornography content in India spiked by 95 per cent amid lockdown. Terms such as “child porn,” “sexy child” and “teen sex videos” appeared in frequent searches as per a report citing data from pornography website Pornhub.

As per National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, in 2018 alone, Facebook registered 16.8 million reports with it about child abuse imagery. In 2018, India had over 480 million Internet users across the country. This figure was projected to grow to over 660 million users by 2023. In fact, India was ranked as the second largest online market worldwide in 2019, coming second only to China.

While the given mammoth statistic makes the situation bad, this trend of migration of potential and habitual child sexual offenders, paedophiles, child rapists and child pornography addicts is even more worrying as the current coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing lockdown has resulted in digital classrooms, bringing more and more children and teenagers into the fold of Internet. Approximately 71 million children aged between 5-11 years in India access the Internet on devices of their family members, constituting nearly 14 per cent of the country’s active Internet user base of over 500 million, as per the latest Internet & Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) ‘Digital in India’ report. The migration of child sexual offenders online also feeds off a deep-seated systemic culture of domestic or “offline” child sexual abuse.

Toxic Masculinity and the Need for Inclusive Sex Education.

If the recent boys locker room controversy—a group of privileged school-going, teenage Delhi boys sharing morphed, obscene images of girls and making objectionable comments—is anything to go by, there is a widespread culture of toxic masculinity that is hardwired into boys from a young age through institutionalised patriarchy. Toxic masculinity is normalised by adults—men and women—at homes, schools, workplaces

and now on family WhatsApp groups, and as Prabhat Kumar, deputy director, Child Protection for Save the Children says, “boys pick their role models early on”. A culture that prides on male children and raises a boy and girl on a scale of unequal opportunity and standard normalises misguided pride in manliness. But it is not toxic masculinity alone that fuels toxic conversations around sexuality; it is as much a matter of lack of inclusive sex education that fails to impart lessons in consent and constructive body image perceptions to children that foster such toxicity.

Given the wide-ranging usage of the Internet for educational as well as recreational purposes, coupled with loneliness and sometimes alienation from parents or extended family members, a mere “with parental permission” is not enough to deal with complexities driven by the data world. From games to mock play-ups and message boards, simulation to sensationalism—from facts to myth—the gaze of the Internet is demanding. A lot of parents are still not exposed to the looming threats.

“Parents need to develop a relationship built on trust with their children, bond with them and engage them in open communication from an early age. Such a culture will enable the identification of patterns of threat and behaviour of potential offenders; what is needed is more exposure,” says Kumar.

If on the one hand, if there is a lack of informed sex education, there is the social evil of stigma that shames the victim. Once a photograph/video of a child is out, especially a girl child, she is stigmatised and further harassed. If in urban areas, families and caregivers coupled with peer pressure often fail to address the psychological trauma, low self-esteem, anxiety pangs, trust deficit, body image issues arising out of sexual abuse, in rural areas children from underprivileged families are often lured, trafficked and eventually sold for pornographic content.

“Children and young adults need to be made aware of what healthy boundaries within friendships and different relationships stand for. Anything shared once on the Internet is out there forever, even Instagram stories or Snapchats don’t ever disappear! Sharing one’s intimate photos may create an unhealthy power imbalance and extreme vulnerability in some relationships, especially after a discord. Parents and teachers need to tell children if their friends are making them guilt trip into sharing content that they’re not comfortable with, then the power to say a “no”

with their head held high, is also doable,” says Sonal Kapoor, founder-director, Protsahan India Foundation.

What Constitutes Online Child Sexual Abuse

According to Priti Mahara, director, policy research & advocacy at NGO CRY – Child Rights and You, the greater use of Internet is associated with some social and psychological variables such as: decline in the size of social circle; depression; loneliness; lower self-esteem and life satisfaction; sensation seeking; poor mental health; low family function.

“Children are made the subjects of photos that are then sent into cyberspace, or they are advertised online as commodities, and /or they are affected by violence and harms arising from other people’s online interactions, including the use of pornography. Gender is (also) seen to be a risk factor, with seemingly more girls than boys appearing to be harmed through cyberspace interactions. However, boys are also increasingly featured in pornographic images circulating online,” says Mahara.

“The lack of digital literacy and online safety measures also exposing children to hazards of cyber-crimes like cyber bullying, cyber stalking, identity theft, sexual predation and other crimes, and Internet addiction. Associated Internet-related risks are harassment, invasion of privacy and exposure to pornographic and violent content,” says Mahara.

Law and Questions of Jurisprudence

A recent study conducted CRY – Child Rights and You – on “Online Safety and Internet Addiction”, conducted amongst adolescents in Delhi-NCR reveals that, The adolescents had easy access to the Internet—93 per cent of the respondents had access to the Internet in their homes, and 60 percent of the boys and 40 percent of the girls owned mobiles. Eighty per cent of the boys and 59 per cent of the girls had social media accounts and 31 percent of the adolescents had more than two accounts. Three in five adolescents (63 per cent) said they accepted friendship/connect requests only from people they knew while the rest said they accepted requests from friends of friends and strangers. The same study reflected that as the children grow, they tend to accept friendship from persons whom they do not know offline in real life i.e. from strangers and friends of friends.

One in three adolescents reported going through negative experiences on the Internet. Around 10 percent of the respondents disclosed being subjected to cyber-bullying. Only one in two adolescents reported the cyber-bullying incident. It is noteworthy that cyber-bullying occurred least among adolescents who had knowledge about NCERT guidelines for Internet Safety.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012 is a comprehensive law to provide for the protection of children from the offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, while safeguarding the interests of the child at every stage of the judicial process. The said Act defines a child as any person below 18 years of age, and defines different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault.

“If you speak about offenders, we do not have any special offerings either from the Information Technology Act, or POCSO Act or IPC as to how to handle them and what else should be done other than the punishment already prescribed, i.e. fining and sentencing to jail.

If the offender is a child then the provisions of Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act should be applicable. As per this law, bail may be cancelled and the offender child may mandatorily be sent to observation home or special home only when granting bail may be considered dangerous to him because he may go back to the negativity because of his peer group or the group which was using him for committing crime, and he does not have fit guarding and care provider who may prevent him from going back to such influencers,” says Dr. Debarati Halder, professor of Legal Studies at Unitedworld School of Law, Ahmedabad, and author of Child Sexual Abuse and Protection Laws in India (Sage Publishing).

In the case of adults, detention and slapping of fines are the most chosen sentences that are prescribed by the judiciary. Even in detention or judicial custody, there may not be an absolute possibility to guarantee complete restriction of access to electronic devices, Internet etc.

There are multiple reports of offenders running rackets of cyber-crimes from jails. In her book, Halder talks about using therapeutic jurisprudence and innovative sentencing processes by judiciary in such cases which may be beneficial for both the offender and the victim. “Truly speaking, India

does not have any strong mechanism to monitor offenders of online child sexual abuse because monitoring may be extremely time consuming and costly. We need to get the proper infrastructure and the police force must be trained properly so that they do not infringe on privacy while tracking/monitoring offenders,” says Halder.

In January this year, the Rajya Sabha panel studying the proliferation of child sexual abuse material on social media recommended multiple changes to the Information Technology Act and its intermediary rules, including allowing law enforcement agencies to break encryption to trace people distributing such material.

Sexualised Portrayal of Children in Popular Culture

A host of reality singing, dancing and comedy television shows aired on national television end up sexualising children, especially girl children. From overtly sexualised clothes, makeup and accessories to moves, gestures and expressions— children and teenagers end up imitating the moves of adult actors/singers etc. From lip-synching to innuendos to playing the chubby and cutesy acts, children are portrayed in an objectionable manner, much akin to “fantasy” keyword searches like “sexy child”, “sexy school girl”, “school girl sex” and many more. Parents don’t complain either as the entertainment industry brings big money and quick fame. Similarly, fashion labels that sell ridiculously funny/morbid versions of “cute” adult wear in the kid version only help in tilting the picture in favour of fantasising.

To understand child sexual abuse, we need to understand child rights. Since child sexual abuse leaves children scarred and traumatised, the legal framework must stress on child-friendly procedural, interrogation, court rooms, police personnel and support groups, primarily families and schools apart from child psychologists and other social stakeholders.

To raise children in a culture where they are treated as having informed self-agency, to answer their questions with facts and sensitivity and not in childish metaphors, and to make them understand and value their own privacy that includes protecting their bodies are only the first steps towards creating more empowered children. Since cyber sexual crimes against children are not localised as the perpetrator might be sitting anywhere between Lucknow and Luxemburg and beyond, there needs to be collaborative efforts among global players, as Kumar points out.



Sanhati Banerjee has held senior editorial positions at the India Today Group. Sanhati joined MAKERS India as Senior Writer and Copy Editor in May. She tracks stories on gender-based barriers to sexual and reproductive health rights among distressed populations and women's representation in sports, films, politics, etc.

LOCKER ROOM BOYS TO IT CELL MEN: INDIA'S RAPE CULTURE GROWS WITHOUT SHAME OR CONSEQUENCES

Jyoti Yadav

5 May 2020, ThePrint.in

If Delhi schoolboys on Instagram privately plan to rape underage girls, then men from IT cells of political parties publicly threaten women on Twitter and Facebook.

India has a rape culture. When not making “victims” out of women — young and old, newborn and dead — it breathes life into Indian boys’ and men’s everyday public conversations and private group chats. One such private group on Instagram, Bois Locker Room, was outed on Twitter Sunday. Screenshots of Delhi schoolboys sharing images of underage girls, with conversations ranging from ‘jokes’ about their private parts to planning a gang rape, went viral. They finally drew the attention of the Delhi Commission for Women, which sent a notice to both the police and Instagram demanding a probe.

But while this Instagram group had about 30-35 members, thousands of locker room boys grew up into the same sexist and misogynist adults a long time ago, and no one took note. As members of Indian political parties’ IT cells, they are doing publicly what Bois Locker Room boys did privately. They log into their social media accounts every day and go after women who wear ‘short clothes’, speak their mind, talk back to them, don’t worship their political leaders, or don’t ascribe to their political ideologies — everything that hits at their masculinity. IT cells of all political parties — BJP, AAP and Congress — are part of this big boys’ club. But the BJP IT cell is most notorious.

The tools deployed by these men to target women are the same — threats of gang rape, mutilation, reminders of past heinous crimes, body shaming, slut-shaming, character assassination, and spreading rumours. These men reduce the existence of women to sexual intercourse and their body parts and want to teach them a lesson by circulating their nude pictures. They don’t spare their target’s mother, sister or any female relative.

Almost all these men swear by their religion, are “nationalists and patriots”, and are followed by leading politicians of India, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Some are politicians themselves, like former MLA and BJP leader Kapil Mishra, who has targeted public figures such as Swara Bhasker, Kavita Krishnan, Shehla Rashid, Barkha Dutt, Alka Lamba in the past and most recently, directed his vulgarity at Jamia student Safoora Zargar over her pregnancy.

The ‘shock’ is shocking

As the screenshots of ugly conversations of Bois Locker Room began to emerge on Twitter, many expressed shock over the language, the sexualisation of underage girls as well as the fact that they were casually planning to rape a girl. But if the locker room boys talk mostly about girls’ breasts, the big boys of IT cells are obsessed with women’s vaginas. Every other day, there’s a Twitter hashtag targeting the genitals of the mother of the person in whose name the attack is trending. But these rarely draw anyone’s attention — be it of Twitter authorities, the Indian police or the government. It’s part of men’s everyday conversation to refer to a mother or sister’s vagina; men’s abuses directed at other men are centred on telling them they rape their mothers and sisters.

The sex lives of women are also of great interest to these men who use sex as a tool to ‘shame’ their targets. Take for instance the recent case of Safoora Zargar, a Jamia scholar, who was arrested in connection with anti-CAA protests. Zargar is more than three months pregnant and continues to be lodged in Tihar Jail despite social media activists and Amnesty International calling for her release.

A barrage of tweets has been directed at her over her pregnancy by the IT cell, which picked pace after BJP’s known rabble-rouser Kapil Mishra put out a nasty tweet. Safoora Zargar has been trending on Twitter for the past couple of days. Her pregnancy has been questioned, with some bigoted trolls accusing her of becoming pregnant while still not being married (which she is). Because of her association with Shaheen Bagh protests, the IT cell trolls, most of whom hide behind the cloak of anonymity, started memes on Azadi. She was linked to various men and even to a Sikh man who sold his flat to feed the anti-CAA protesters.

No difference between boys and men

The modus operandi of the IT cell and Bois Locker Room is the same. Some random guy makes a random comment about 'a night at Le Meridien Hotel' or 'an incident in the park' or some such tale. Soon, a flood of comments pour in with abuses and invoking 'Bharatiya sanskriti' (Indian culture). Then a person with a verified account on Twitter or Facebook publicly chimes in with his (or her) two cents and the character assassination process of the woman is complete. Everyone in the IT cell thereupon starts writing anything about the woman as others laugh, mock, and amplify the attack with cheer. Safoora Zargar faces added vehemence because of her religion. A quick look at the comments people like journalist Rana Ayyub or activist Shehla Rashid receive on a daily basis will make it clear the kind of trash that women from the Muslim community face on a daily basis simply because of their religion.

Then there are the abuses that 75-year-old Congress president Sonia Gandhi gets from men who chant 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and claim India to be a country where women are worshipped and respected.

Turkish author Ece Temelkuran writes about this horror in her book *How To Lose A Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship*. She says these groups terrorise the language towards women and laugh at the horror. They make abuse a new normal. In a patriarchal society, women who are vocal or speak up against harassment are targeted on social media in the same language that women who battle domestic abuse face at home.

India's rape culture is built on a loose talk where women are perceived as sexual objects and men of all ages and groups denigrate them regularly, whether happy or angry. And those who don't indulge in outright abuses provide a 'support' system.

They defend locker room boys as 'kids' whose lives shouldn't be spoiled because of a 'mistake'. As for the grown men, they are forever-boys which, in a country where public rallies are taken out in the defence of rape accused, has time and again said: "boys will be boys".



Jyoti Yadav is a multimedia journalist working as a Senior Correspondent with The Print. She has extensively covered policy, politics, gender issues in rural India. She is currently documenting the fall out of the second deadly Covid wave in rural India.

#LOVESEXANDTECH

Indu L. Harikumar

Instagram

#LoveSexAndTech was a people-powered art project run by Indu Harikumar on Instagram, supported by a grant (Take Back The Tech) from APC. It aimed to document the shrinkage of internet space occupied by women due to gender based violence in intimate relationships. It looked at restrictions, surveillance and control placed by intimate partners, which could lead to an unequal access to this virtual space and sometimes to abuse and how some of us had reclaimed our space.

Website: <https://individuality.com>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/individuality>



Indu.L.Harikumar is an artist and storyteller. She tells stories of body, desire, love and belonging. She has authored and illustrated children's books and has written for major media houses worldwide. Her art has been exhibited globally at Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany.





FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION: ISSUES DURING THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 has distressed societies to the core. One of the fault lines it has exposed is that gender bias remains rampant in news coverage. The media's focus on the impact of the pandemic has been majorly on hospitalization, deaths and other health impacts. There is less attention on how the pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities in our society. The lockdown has made the road to building a gender-equal community rockier as there seems to be a rollback on issues related to women's rights, roles and responsibilities. Media outlets are missing out on highlighting the vast discrimination women around the world face.

The National Commission of Women recorded a 2.5 times increase in domestic violence during the first lockdown period. In addition, NGOs working with women have reported receiving more complaints of domestic violence than they had in the last ten years. Soma Basu discusses the 'silent pandemic' women faced in her article, 'A parallel pandemic as domestic abuse victims trapped with their abusers'. She highlights how the 'stay home and Stay Safe' option failed to apply to battered women facing domestic violence. The author cites multiple layers of domestic abuse- physical, emotional, and psychological- during the lockdown that most victims don't recognize as violence. In addition, she documents an increase in taunts, name-calling, and beating post the pandemic due to the double burden of the fear of COVID-19 and increased family responsibilities.

The National Crime Records Bureau has also recorded about a 50 per cent rise in the cases of child marriages in 2020 over the previous year. Sadaf Modak reports about instances of child marriages from 3 districts of Maharashtra in her article, '80 cases of child marriages stopped, 16 FIRs filed since lockdown enforced'.

A Special feature by Adrija Bose also cites many examples where parents have got their teenaged girls married as it will mean one less mouth to feed in her article, 'Pulled Out of school, Pushed into Marriage'. What the pandemic is doing to India's teenaged girls.' Both the winning entries point to the closure of schools, lack of financial security due to uncertainty over livelihoods, non-availability of mid-day meals and free sanitary napkins as significant reasons to push girls out of the education system and into forced marriages.

Greater engagement in unpaid household work and the falling number of jobs across sectors have skewed women's participation in the workforce. As a result, India's female labour participation rate fell to 15.5 % in April-June, 2020 and 16.1% during the July-September 2020 quarter, which is the lowest among the major economies. These statistics reflect the impact of the pandemic and a widening job crisis. The news report by Somya Lakhani, 'Women out of work: We were moving up the ladder ab lagta hai kisi ne sidhi cheen li', personalised these statistics by sharing the struggles of first-generation women bread earners in Delhi, post COVID-19 lockdown.

An investigative story by Md. Asgar Khan titled, 'कोरोना की एक कहानी ऐसी भी: देश में 9 लाख सेक्स वर्कर, जो इसी पेशे के बूते बच्चों की पढ़ाई के लोन, बूढ़ी माँ का इलाज कराती थीं अब आर्थिक तंगी से जूझ रही', tells us the loss of livelihood of sex workers in Ranchi due to lockdown and imposition of restrictions. He reports that this community is on the brink of starvation as 95% of sex workers have been rendered unemployed since the pandemic.

Mahima Jain writes specifically about the contrast between the intended objectives of microfinance and actual practices after lending the money during the pandemic. In 'As India's Credit Sector Falters, So Do Women's Livelihoods', she discloses that the loan disbursement rate fell during COVID-19 times due to volatility in incomes of the poor.

Globally, seventy per cent of health care and social workers are women and hence are the first responders in mitigating the pandemic outbreak. A special feature by Rituparna Chatterjee paints a vivid picture of the frontline workers in PPE kits facing menstrual discomfort. The article, 'Frontline workers explain what it is like to bleed in protective gear during Covid', describes the challenges menstruating women face in other professions (ASHA workers and journalists) during the pandemic due to lack of public facilities.

Subhiksha Manoj and Bharati Kannan's blog, 'Coping with pandemic stress, mental health and menstrual disorders in 2020,' correlates mental health and menstruation- both taboo subjects in India. The author shares the challenges and coping mechanisms of women who dealt with menstrual disorders during the pandemic.

All the award winners under this section focus on various aspects of inequality that have worsened since the onset of the covid-19 pandemic. For example, the pandemic has reinforced gender-specific roles in society as "breadwinner men" and "caregiver women."

PRINT & WEB MEDIA

A PARALLEL PANDEMIC AS DOMESTIC ABUSE VICTIMS TRAPPED WITH THEIR ABUSERS

Soma Basu

20 April 2020, The Hindu

With the COVID-19 lockdown resulting in abusers and victims trapped together, #StayHomeStaySafe is an irony, and most caregivers are at a loss to know how to help Mithu, 43, was all set to walk out of her marriage and shift into a working women's hostel on April 1. But the COVID-19 lockdown means she is now locked in with her husband and mother-in-law in a two-bedroom flat in Kolkata.

"Every day is a nightmare. My husband is short-tempered and foul-mouthed. Though I am doing the household work, he is constantly nitpicking and telling me I have ruined his life. I don't feel safe with him," Mithu said, over a distress call to the city's violence helpline number at Swayam last week.

"I called up the local police station and asked them to check on her and also told Mithu to keep herself confined to her room, hide things like kitchen knives and kerosene, and if need be, scream for help from her balcony," says Gargee Guha, Swayam's team coordinator. The organisation opened five new lines on April 13 and within 72 hours received 10 calls from distraught women.

A 34-year-old woman from South 24 Parganas called the same helpline to say how her husband, who had abandoned her for eight years for another woman, suddenly returned during lockdown as she continued to stay with his parents. "He is now sexually abusing me daily," she had sobbed over the phone.

The domestic abuse virus Domestic violence haunts women across ages even more aggressively now, says Gargee. She talks of a 70-year-old woman tortured by both her husband and son over money and food.

There are multiple layers of domestic abuse — physical, emotional, psychological — and some victims don't even recognise it, though their self-esteem and confidence are crushed through taunts, name calling, and beating, she says. It's a double burden of the fear of both COVID-19 and the family.

'Stay Home, Stay Safe' is the battle cry to protect everyone from the COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the world. While the global health emergency has posed an unprecedented threat to all, a shadow pandemic is ironically making homes, thought of as safe spaces, unsafe for many women. Countless women are now trapped with perpetrators: they cannot go out, are cut off from their friends, unable to make calls and complain, or move to a safe place like their parents' homes.

"Whom do I fight, the distant fear of the Coronavirus or the immediate fear of my husband who slaps me just because the dal was not cooked properly today," Archana recently confided, to her neighbour in an apartment block in Dwarka, Delhi.

Archana works in a local play school and lives with her aged parents-in-law, an unmarried sister-in-law and her two pre-teen children. Two weeks ago, her husband was told that he may be laid off and she became a target for his ire and insecurity. Her neighbour reports that he gets irritated and shouts at her often, insulting her in front of other family members. Nobody stops him. Her children are fearful. He finds fault with what she cooks, what she wears at home, how she takes care of his parents.

She is not sure if she will get her salary next month. Her parents live in Kanpur, but she does not want to tell them her troubles. Her neighbour has tried explaining to her that mental and emotional abuse is also domestic abuse, but Archana is not yet ready to call a helpline number. Lockdown loopholes

The police, healthcare providers, mental health counsellors, and social workers are overwhelmed by several constraints during the essential lockdown to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. With the exception of some States like Telangana that have declared helplines as essential services, in the rest of the country, immediate intervention as a rescue measure is found wanting.

The National Commission for Women (NCW) flagged the spike in complaints when it received 257 online complaints between March 23 and April 1 (when the country was under the first lockdown phase). The complaints more than doubled from the pre-lockdown week of March 1 to 8. But the lockdown imposition has also seen the complaints receding subsequently.

“Women are being subjected to physical, mental, and sexual assault but are failing to ask for help because they think all services are closed and there is nobody to listen to them,” says Rekha Sharma, the NCW chairperson. The NCW has now opened different channels with a WhatsApp number (7217735372), emails (complaintcell-ncw@nic.in / ncw@nic.in / chairperson-ncw@nic.in), and more responsive social media platforms (Facebook.com/NCWIndia, <https://Twitter.com/NCWIndia>).

“At the moment, we are not interested in collating data or differentiating between old and new cases. We are taking cognizance of the complaints, and depending on the severity of each case, seeking police help to rescue women who are in distress,” says Sharma. So far, 69 cases of physical violence have been reported and the respective area police have been apprised of the matter. “We have suggested the distressed women could be shifted to shelter homes under police protection,” she adds.

Dr. Vijaya Rukmini Rao, Executive Director of Gramya Resource Centre for Women that runs one-stop crisis centres called Sakhi in 33 districts of Telangana says, “Women usually come to the centre to lodge complaints. Now, they are finding it difficult to even call their husbands around at home. Some have managed to call surreptitiously from their bathrooms, but it is not easy to follow up, as many of the victims are not even able to recharge their phones. “With COVID-19 precautions and a skeletal staff, it is not possible to do home visits,” she says, and cites a case in Nalgonda district where the team had to seek the village sarpanch’s intervention in resolving a complainant’s domestic issue.

Vaishnaruby Raja, a senior clinical psychologist from Coimbatore, has counselled six people in a week post-lockdown. In one case, a wife called to say she was depressed as her husband had taken to alcohol abuse out of anxiety over a financial crisis. In another, a college-going boy said his father was becoming violent, beating up his mother and

even grandmother, because he was having alcohol withdrawals. “There are many calls which we are not able to follow up on due to lockdown restraints,” says Vaishnaruby. Men tend to vent their frustrations through violence on the most intimate member. She fears a surge in domestic problems once the lockdown is lifted. “With prolonged uncertainty of the pandemic, patience will give way soon and the full impact of the crisis will unfold,” she says.

Though collective countrywide data is yet to emerge on domestic violence during the national lockdown, NGOs are finding it difficult to cope with the complaints received online. According to the National Family Health Survey-4, one in three women in India suffers physical and sexual violence at home. But these are unusual times, says Delhi-based Jagori’s medical counsellor Sunita Thakur. “In the given situation where we cannot meet them in person, we are only able to help a distressed caller strategise her safety,” she says. “With the support systems such as police and doctors totally occupied with Coronavirus patients now, it is difficult to coordinate help for domestic violence victims.”

From helpline Sneha in Mumbai to Women in Governance in Assam, NGOs are only dealing with online calls that describe stress gone out of control.

“We are trying to do con calls or Zoom sessions involving the family. We encourage the vulnerable complainants to speak out instead of feeling isolated. We are asking them to call the national helpline numbers so that their repeated calls, even if unattended, get registered as emergency at least,” says Gargee. “Apart from showing empathy, we are unable to do anything more at this moment,” she adds.

What can we do?

The idea of safety within home is a very gendered area. It is important for a battered woman to recognise that she is in an emergency situation. Our NGOs are under-resourced and offer patchy services with their inadequate networking with medical professionals, cops and lawyers. Yet their timely intervention in recording a complaint is half the emotional battle won.

This is the time for the authorities to establish more one-stop centres to holistically deal with the issue of domestic violence and also build more

shelters or immediately identify and use the dharamshalas for the victims as a preventive escape. The district administrations need to be proactive and preemptive. A minimum cash transfer to women suffering domestic abuse, not necessarily physical attacks but economic deprivation, would give them the hope and right to live with dignity. — Karuna Nundy, Lawyer Perhaps a silver lining Sujata Mody, leader of the Chennai-based women worker's union Penn Thozhilalar Sangam, says in the less privileged section of society, the incidence of domestic abuse seems to be reducing. "With no money for alcohol, the men in marginally poor families are actually sharing the burden of household work and couples are liking the break from their rushed lives," she says.

Dr. Vijaya Rao says Sakhi received 44 domestic violence complaints between April 1 and 13 from across Telangana and this number is much lower than in non-COVID-19 times.



Soma Basu works with the Tamil Nadu bureau of The Hindu. She specialises as a features writer and reports on various subjects from health and lifestyle to food and travel, environment, archaeology, books and many other social issues.

MAHARASHTRA: 80 CASES OF CHILD MARRIAGE STOPPED, 16 FIRS FILED SINCE LOCKDOWN ENFORCED

Sadaf Modak

21 June 2020, The Indian Express

After receiving letters and WhatsApp messages from minor girls seeking help and anonymous alerts from vigilant villagers, the state government and NGOs have intervened to stop as many as 80 instances of child marriages in Maharashtra since the nationwide lockdown was enforced in March. So far, FIRs have been registered in 16 other cases in which the incidents came to light after the marriage ceremonies.

According to data collated by the state's Women and Child Development (WCD) department, a surge is being seen in cases of child marriages due to factors including the lockdown, and the resultant closure of schools, impact on rural economy and lack of financial security and uncertainty over livelihood which has pushed many into poverty.

"Most cases were reported in Solapur, Buldhana and Aurangabad districts so far with 11, 10 and eight cases respectively so far," said WCD assistant commissioner Manisha Biraris. She added that steps were being taken to study the reasons and to continue to stall such forced marriages through interventions from child marriage prohibition officers and child protection committees across the state.

The National Crime Records Bureau's annual Crime in India report states that only 13 cases were reported under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act in 2018, 20 in 2017 and 16 in 2016 in the state. Officials said that incidents in which girls as young as 13 were being forced to marry have come to light from March to June, including in some cases to men double their age. Most ceremonies were taking place within homes without inviting any relatives due to the lockdown which authorities say mean that the numbers could be higher.

In most cases, WCD department, police and district, taluka and village level child protection committees have been receiving alerts or calls are being received by helplines like CHILDLINE including from the minor girls.

“A 14-year-old girl called us and said that she wanted to study further but was being forced to marry. We took basic details from her like her name, age, address, venue of the marriage to ensure that she is not intimidated. Police and other local authorities were alerted and the marriage was stopped a few hours before the ceremony,” said Vijay Muttur, protection officer from Solapur, where the maximum cases have been reported.

In most cases, parents of the minor girls were counselled. “In many cases, parents told us that they did not have money to pay an extra person due to the financial strain on them. Many children depended on their schools for at least one meal a day,” Muttur said.

Other officials said that in some cases parents expressed apprehension that the temporary shutdown of schools had also made the girls vulnerable to sexual harassment within large families or neighbourhoods hence they sought to marry them. “There is an apprehension regarding when things will get back to normal. Many said that they did not know if they will have enough money later to perform the marriages. The worrying trend is the young age group of 13-15 being forced into marriages,” said Divesh Marathe, the district child protection officer from Buldhana. He added that detecting cases is also becoming difficult because when asked about the whereabouts of minor girls, parents say they have gone to the homes of relatives. “When schools are functioning regularly, the girls dropping out or their lack of attendance for days immediately brings their absence to notice,” Marathe said.

“We have directed gram sevaks and aganwadi workers to give us monthly reports of adolescent girls in the villages,” said Muttur about Solapur district. Authorities said that in some cases, it has also been reported that gram sevaks colluded with those performing the marriages. Appropriate action will be initiated, officials added.

“Due to the financial crisis being faced by many today, given a choice between educating the boy or the girl in the family, there is a likelihood of many girls being forced to drop out and hence forced into marriage.

There is a need to strengthen the child protection committees and the working of child marriage prohibition officers to increase community participation to prevent such incidents,” said Santosh Shinde, child rights activist and founder of group Vidhayak Bharti.

Other 12 districts including Mumbai, Pune, Thane, Palghar, Satara, Raigad, Bhandara, Sindhudurg, Nandurbar, Gadchiroli have not reported a single case. Officials said this could also mean such instances may have gone unreported in these districts.



Sadaf Modak has been with The Indian Express in Mumbai since 2016. She has previously worked with The Telegraph and Mumbai Mirror covering courts, crime and prison through gender.

PULLED OUT OF SCHOOL, PUSHED INTO MARRIAGE: WHAT THE PANDEMIC IS DOING TO INDIA'S TEENAGED GIRLS

Adrija Bose

12 June 2020, News18.com

Following the 2004 tsunami, girls were forced into marriage with tsunami widowers. After the Ebola crisis, the number of girls who dropped out of schools almost tripled in countries that suffered. The Coronavirus pandemic may mean thousands of girls won't go back to school and be forced into marriages.

In Rajasthan's Beer village, Pinky, an eighth-grade dropout, has been preparing for her enrollment in open school examination. As the pandemic hit, the family lost all sources of income and became dependent on the ration that was provided by the Panchayat. With help from locals, they were able to get MNREGA card — their only source of income. But when liquor shops reopened as the government started easing the lockdown rules, Pinky's alcoholic father, who was drinking country-made liquor, beat her, her three sisters and their mother to take away the remaining money left in the house. A few days later, he sold off the gas cylinder so he could buy more alcohol. With no other income left and very little options, Pinky may not be able to get back to school.

More than 1.5 billion children are out of school due to the disruption caused by the global coronavirus pandemic. In India, schools have been shut since the end of March. While many of those schools have moved to a system of online classrooms, it means very little to Pinky and a thousand others who have only heard of the word 'Google'.

Over a decade ago, India passed the landmark Right to Education (RTE) Act that made education free and compulsory for children between the ages 6 and 14 in 2009. The enrolment of girls in schools has increased but for many reasons, the RTE Act did not help in keeping girls in schools. The shutting down of schools has made the already difficult lives of young girls more challenging, especially in rural India.



“Girls will drop out, they will be made to drop out,” said Poonam Muttreja, executive director of Population Foundation of India. Muttreja noted that the pandemic coupled with the lockdown will be especially hard on teenage girls. “Their mid-day meals are gone, they are not getting sanitary napkins which were provided by schools, they are closed inside homes with no interaction with friends,” she said.

India also has the largest number of anaemic women in the world. With very little income and the absence of mid-day meals for young girls, battling one of the biggest health crises will get more challenging.

Why school will be a fleeting dream for many ?

Earlier this month, a 14-year-old from Kerala killed herself over not being able to attend online classes because she did not have access to the internet or television. The 10th grader who lived in the Mankeri Dalit colony in Walanchery in Malappuram district had bagged the Ayyankali scholarship. Her father, a daily wage labourer, had lost his job during the lockdown and did not have the means to repair the television.

Kerala is one of the very few states where the government is trying to intervene in the disrupted education system. But in a country where more girls are enrolled in government schools and boys in private ones, a shift to online classrooms would benefit, if at all, students in private schools. It means, most girls would be left out.

“My daughter has been sitting idle at home. We don’t have to pay the tuition fee because she goes to a government school. But how long will

she sit at home? Her father has lost his job and I am the sole bread earner. I want her to study but what options do I have?" asked Rinku, a domestic help in Delhi. Her daughter is in the 7th grade. "If I find a good partner for her, maybe I will..." Rinku stops short of finishing the sentence, but her plans for her daughter's future are obvious.

The 14th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for 2019, based on a survey conducted in 26 districts across 24 states in India, notes that "Gender gaps are visible even among young children with more girls than boys enrolled in government institutions and more boys than girls enrolled in private institutions."

"If a family has a son and a daughter and they can afford to send only one of them to a private school, it's usually the son. The daughter goes to a government school. This reflects in the quality of education that girls receive," said Muttreja.

The ASER report notes that among children between the ages of 4 and 5, 56.8% of girls are enrolled in government schools, compared to 50.4% of boys, while 43.2% girls and 49.6% boys are enrolled in private pre-schools or schools. The difference gets wider with their age. In the 6-8 years age bracket, 61.1% of the girls attend a government school, versus 52.1% of all boys.

The pandemic has also brought forward what the landmark RTE Act had failed to acknowledge and address. The biggest reason why girls have been unable to go to schools — housework. The burden of housework on Indian girls has been a spiralling crisis for India. "Even before Covid-19,



girls in India did substantially more unpaid care work than boys. This mirrors Indian adults – Indian women have among the highest number of hours spent per day on care work (297 minutes a day) while Indian men have among the lowest (31 minutes),” said Antara Ganguly, Gender Specialist at UNICEF India.

In its 2015 report on gender inequality in India, the McKinsey Global Institute found that Indian women perform nearly 10 times the unpaid care work as men. That’s almost three times more than the global average. The 2018 report found that girls who do two hours of housework per day have a 63 percent probability of finishing secondary school.

Rinku’s 15-year-old daughter now cooks and cleans her house as her mother steps out to work in others’ houses. “In India, girls are generally less likely than boys to transition to and graduate from secondary school. We are concerned that as Covid-19 impacts parents’ ability to invest in all their children’s education, some of these tough choices will come down even harder on girls,” said Ganguly.

Soon after the lockdown, Saarthi Education, an NGO that works on underprivileged children’s education, designed and implemented a WhatsApp-based learning program for Nursery to Grade 5 students. Parents receive a worksheet on WhatsApp every morning. They copy out the worksheet in their child’s notebook and guide their child to complete the worksheet. They then click a photograph of the child’s work and share it with their Relationship Manager and wait for feedback on their performance.

“There is a genuine fear that children may drop out of schools because of them being shut for a long duration. Parents are cutting expenses and saving money - they are planning to enrol their child in school later on. Some may not find it valuable to pay for their child to attend school for only half a year, this might result in a longer drop out duration,” said Smruti Savkur, Founding Partner of Saarthi Education.

The WhatsApp model was chosen keeping in mind the low internet access and that most families don’t have more than one smartphone if they do. However, Rajkumari, a community leader who works with families and children living in the Jaitpur neighbourhood of Delhi-Faridabad border, says that the partiality in how parents treat their children based on their

gender is visible.” It’s always the boys who get to finish their homework first,” she said. The families who own two phones are only recharging one now with their limited earnings. “Girls are naturally in a more precarious situation,” she added.

Do Girls have Phones and Laptops ?

On the first day of June, the Kerala government had restarted classes for school students from LKG to Class XII with experimental virtual classes on YouTube and through the government-run education channel, Kite Vickers. But the death of the student has highlighted the existing divide in the country when it comes to accessing online education tools. Incidentally, more than half of Kerala’s inhabitants have access to the internet, which is far higher than the rest of the country.

A 2018 report by the Internet And Mobile Association of India also showed that the state has among the highest rates of internet use by women. Across the country, the same report noted that there are 143 million women internet users, which is approximately only 30 percent of the total Internet users; 70 percent of the Internet users are men.

According to the Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India report, based on the 2017-18 National Sample Survey, less than 15% of rural Indian households have internet (as opposed to 42% urban Indian households). A mere 13% of people surveyed (aged above five) in rural areas — just 8.5% of females — could use the internet. The poorest households cannot afford a smartphone or a computer.

India’s stark gender digital divide was pointed out by the 2020 GSMA Mobile Gender Gap report that noted that women are 20 per cent less likely to use mobile internet than men. It also noted that more than 300 million fewer women than men access the internet on a mobile, particularly in South Asia where that gap is at around 51 per cent. This gap is even higher in rural areas.

“Parents still do not want their daughters to use smartphones because they are worried about what they believe might be negative consequences of the freedom it might bring them,” said Ganguly.

Shabnam Aziiz, project leader for Adolescent Girls Programme that is a part of the NGO ‘Educate Girls’, says that most girls in rural India are not allowed to use phones in the fear that they will ‘taste freedom’. It’s not

unusual for families to fear giving out mobile phones to their daughters as even lawmakers in Karnataka have blamed mobile phones for the sexual violence against women.

A report tabled in the Karnataka Assembly by the state's Women and Child Development Department in 2014 read, "There were several instances where mobile phones were used to lure girls to remote places and rape them. Mobile phones are debasing the educational atmosphere in schools and colleges."

Eighteen-year-old Seema from Nawab village in Rajasthan attempted suicide by consuming poison after her brother slapped her for using her cellphone 'very frequently'. Seema, a class 8 dropout, was forcibly withdrawn from school so she can help in domestic chores. The family had purchased a mobile phone for use at home. During the lockdown, as Seema's brother and father stayed home, they observed that she was using the phone. The abuse and violence began soon after and had it not been for quick treatment, Seema wouldn't have been alive.

When Seema got slightly better, her family sent her back to her husband's house. Everyone in the village found out. Families of three other younger girls in the village sent their daughters back to their abusive in-laws fearing losing honour if they got 'influenced' by Seema.

Will Child Marriage Increase ?

In Odisha's Nayagarh district, a month after the lockdown, 16-year-old Soubhagyabati's father, a daily wage labourer, decided to get her married off to a 26-year-old man, a truck driver. With frontline workers busy with the pandemic crisis and the lockdown, he thought he could conduct the marriage without the authorities knowing. The wedding, he thought, would also cost less as the social distancing rules meant he would have to invite only a few guests. Soubhagyabati's friend, who worked at the Anganwadi centre with her, came to her rescue with a call to the childcare helpline.

There was a dramatic upswing in child marriages and trafficking following the Nepal earthquake in 2015. After the Ebola crisis, the number of girls who dropped out of schools almost tripled in countries that suffered. Following the 2004 tsunami, girls in Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka

were forced into marriage with tsunami widowers and in many instances did so to receive state subsidies for marrying and starting a family. In Bangladesh and northeast India, there's enough evidence to show that increased extreme poverty provoked by river erosion and floods often push families to adopt child marriage as a survival strategy.

Worldwide, an estimated 12 million girls are married every year before the age of 18, which amounts to nearly one girl every three seconds. Last month, the UN warned that the pandemic could lead to an extra 13 million child marriages over the next decade.

"Many girls won't return to school because they will be kept at home for caregiving, domestic work, farm grazing and marriage. Child marriage will increase exponentially as families already see girls as a liability and getting them married off will mean one less mouth to feed," said Safeena Husain, founder and executive director at Educate Girls. An additional four million girls are at risk of child marriage in the next two years because of the coronavirus pandemic, a report by global charity World Vision has warned, as deepening poverty is likely to drive many families to marry off their daughters. The report also warns that up to 85 million children face physical, sexual and emotional violence at home and in their communities over the next three months as the financial and emotional pressures of the pandemic worsen.

One of the many ways that the government can encourage girls to go back to school, Hussain feels, is to address safety. "The government needs to ensure girls who are above 10-12 years who are at a higher risk of child marriages in particularly high-risk areas have hostels to live in. They need to invest in setting up places for girls to stay," she said. The other crisis that needs to be solved is hunger. "It can be take-home ration or meals in schools, but hunger has to be addressed for children to go back to school," she added. The founder of Educate Girls also said that policies which take care of girls' mental health especially if they have lived inside homes for so long and faced domestic violence should be taken up seriously. "There should be no pressure on girls to finish the course – a shift in transitional learning has to happen," she added.

Priyabrata Satapathy, M & E Manager, Ending Child Marriage Programme, ActionAid, who is based out of Odisha, said that reports

of child marriages came even during the lockdown. Lockdown was supposed to keep everyone home and safe, that unfortunately, did not happen. The organisation was able to intervene and stop many of those marriages that were a result of a financial crisis.

While the government is mulling a staggered reopening of schools gradually, a 15-year-old Manashi in Subarnapur district of Odisha was married off in late March because her father wanted to reduce the number of mouths to feed. When the Child Marriage Prohibition Officers found out, they brought back Manashi from her in-laws and with the help of ActionAid sent her to her parents' home. When she turns 18, the parents will send her off. Manashi won't go back to school.



Adrija Bose is a digital journalist who writes on gender, culture, and the Internet. She has worked across several newsrooms for the last decade and is currently working as a senior editor at BOOM.

WOMEN OUT OF WORK: WE WERE MOVING UP THE LADDER AND AB LAGTA HAI KISI NE SEEDHI CHHEEN LI

Somya Lakhani

19 November 2020, The Indian Express

Strap: The Covid lockdown has set off sweeping economic distress in cities but its crucial dimension has remained untold: the silent, devastating toll on the working woman in the city suddenly out of work. A month into the lockdown after she lost her job at an energy policy institute that paid Rs 24,000 a month, 29-year-old Reshma, a post-graduate in social work, sent her four-year-old daughter to live with her parents. "I can't afford to take care of my child if I don't earn anything. I can't afford a glass of milk a day for her... Sirf ek maa hi yeh dard samajh sakti hai," she said. Her husband was unemployed for a year, and got a job at a petrol pump earlier this month.

*A 40-year-old private school teacher in south Delhi's Sangam Vihar lost her Rs 12,000-per-month job in April. "There is a loan of Rs 40,000 to repay. I have borrowed money from 11 people. After five months, I got a job as a bouncer but the salary was poor... I am ashamed of this, my family has never seen such poverty."

*Priya, 21, was a beautician earning Rs 10,000 per month plus tips in south Delhi's Moolchand. She lost her job in the lockdown, her father lost his at a dry cleaning store. "We have no savings, just loans... I will take up any job." Until she gets one, she's cutting every corner at home. "In rations, CM Arvind Kejriwal is giving chhole so that's all we eat. We are a middle-class family and instead of moving forward, we are going backwards."

The Covid lockdown has set off sweeping economic distress in cities but its crucial dimension has remained untold: the silent, devastating toll on the working woman in the city suddenly out of work.

In the capital, Reshma, the school teacher, and Priya tell that story. From first-time earners to sole breadwinners, beauticians, private school teachers, housekeeping staff, project supervisors, restaurant and bar staff

– many are women proud to be the first generation in their families to work. Many left small towns to pursue — and discover — their aspirations in the city.

Now locked out of the job market, they are being pushed into debt; some are selling off household items their incomes had helped buy, others are returning to places where they came from – all in desperate search for a job. That search may take a while given the latest surge of Covid cases in the capital and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's decision to re-introduce curbs on gatherings at weddings, and his wish to be able to temporarily shut down markets if protocols are not followed.

That will surely be another blow for those already on the brink. Like Aarti Kashyap, 24, who has eight siblings, and a bed-ridden father at home. A project supervisor in a private institute in Delhi, she earned over Rs 25,000 a month, while her mother, who is a domestic help, brought in Rs 8,000 a month working at home in Jangpura.

In April, both lost their jobs. "I checked my bank balance, it was Rs 235. I have exhausted all my savings," said Kashyap over the phone earlier this month. Her family sold an old TV and almirahs and has taken a loan of Rs 50,000 from a relative, and another Rs 30,000 from a local money-lender.

Kashyap's is an illustrative case in a city where, as Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia underlined, 60 percent of the jobs are in the service sector which has been hit the hardest by the pandemic.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Sisodia said the consequences of the lockdown are only now beginning to show despite the pre-Covid safety net. "Our schemes such as free electricity, free water and free travel benefited a lot of women. People living in slums have told me this many times. (Now) there is hardship, no doubt. We had anticipated this and that is why the Chief Minister pushed for re-opening even when other cities were not doing it. Now everyone is doing it. Apart from the disease, there are issues such as starvation, mental stress, and joblessness."

Which translates to a growing realisation for many working women that upward mobility they had aspired to achieve in a city of opportunity may be more elusive than ever.

“We saw the family struggle as my factory-worker father was the only breadwinner. When my brother and I started working, our financial status improved, we bought a bike,” recalled Kashyap. Chhote mote shauk poore kiye inn chhe saalo mein. We thought the struggle period was over and now we were going from a lower middle class family to a middle-class family... Look what 2020 has done to us, we are back to struggling.”

In Noida, 38-year-old Hemalata — who has a teaching experience of 15 years — is struggling for odd jobs to keep her afloat. A sports teacher with a private school, she got laid off when schools shut down. “Who wants to do PT online? Since April, I have borrowed Rs 30,000-Rs 40,000 and can only repay when I have a job. I have never seen such financial stress in my life. I haven’t been able to pay house rent, I have not paid my daughter’s school fee, and also had to pull out the children from tuition,” she said.

If family expenses weigh on Hemlata, it’s the price for being independent that’s turning out unaffordable for Pooja Divakar, 24, who came to Delhi three years ago from Bareilly. It was a move that took a toll on her relationship with her parents who didn’t want their daughter to move to a “big city.” She found work that paid her Rs 23,000 a month, as a guest relations executive in a restaurant in the Garden of Five Senses. She lost that job in April and for six months, Divakar said, she cried herself to sleep worried sick about making room rent and helping out her college-going sister back home in Bareilly.

She ran out of savings and had to borrow Rs 8,000 from a former client to pay her rent. This month she got a job – but at a reduced salary. “There is no growth in a small town. My parents never imagined their child, that too a daughter, would move to Delhi. Here, there are options...I had saved up Rs 1 lakh to learn German at an institute in Connaught Place. I don’t want to work in restaurants my whole life, I want to be a translator. Now I will have to start all over again. The dream is farther away,” said Divakar.

How important is a job — and its salary check — in resisting family pressure and carving an independent space in the city is what 34-year-old Mehrunisha Shokat Ali knows well. “I am from a conservative Muslim family of Saharanpur, where women aren’t allowed to work. I fought my

father and brother first, then the neighbours, and then fought to be called a bouncer than a security guard.” She had two jobs, a private bouncer to a businesswoman in Shahpur Jat in the afternoon, and at a busy bar in Hauz Khas Village late at night. With two jobs and tips, she said, she earned Rs 45,000-Rs 50,000 a month.

“When the money started coming in, I was the queen of the house. We weren’t poor...” she said. Until she lost her job in the bar in March and the businesswoman moved to Punjab.

“I had savings of Rs 3.5 lakh in my bank, and it’s all over,” said Ali. She hasn’t borrowed any money so far but each day in her Madangir home is marked by compromises she doesn’t want to make. “I have found a job but I don’t know how much they will pay, maybe Rs 15,000 a month. I will take it up, I have no option,” she said. “(One time) we were moving up the ladder and Ab lagta hai kisi ne seedhi chheen li hai.”



Somya Lakhani is a Delhi-based journalist working at The Quint. She has previously worked at the Indian Express and covered various topics like gender, crime, labour and heritage.

कोरोना की एक कहानी ऐसी भी: देश में 9 लाख सेक्स वर्कर, जो इसी पेशे के बूते बच्चों की पढ़ाई के लोन, बूढ़ी माँ का इलाज कराती थीं अब आर्थिक तंगी से जूझ रहीं

मो. असगर खान

17 June 2020, भास्कर.कॉम

एआईएनएसडब्लू के मुताबिक यौनकर्मियों को सबसे ज्यादा परेशानी लॉकडाउन खत्म होने के बाद आएगी। क्योंकि प्रवासी मजदूर जो शहरों में रह रहे थे, वो अपने घर जा चुके होंगे। ज्यादातर इनके क्लाइंट वही थे।

एआईएनएसडब्लू के अमित कुमार कहते हैं- कोविड ने देश के 95% सेक्स वर्कर को बेरोजगार कर दिया, फिजिकल डिस्टेंसिंग के मानक ने इनका काम ठप कर दिया लॉकडाउन में भी एनजीओ के जरिए इन तक सूखा राशन, सैनिटाइजर और मास्क पहुंचाया जा रहा, लेकिन यह मदद नाकाफी साबित हो रही

लॉकडाउन के बाद भुखमरी की कगार पर आ चुका एक तबका है सेक्स वर्कर का। इनके पास न सरकारी सुविधाएं हैं, न कानून, न योजनाएं। यहां तक की समाज की सहानुभूति भी इनके हिस्से नहीं आती। यौनकर्मियों के लिए काम करने वाले संगठन 'ऑल इंडिया नेटवर्क ऑफ सेक्सवर्कर्स' (एआईएनएसडब्लू) की अध्यक्ष कुसुम का कहना है कि 'यौनकर्मियों को सबसे ज्यादा दिक्कत लॉकडाउन खत्म होने के बाद आएगी। क्योंकि प्रवासी मजदूर जो शहरों में रह रहे थे, वो अपने घर जा चुके होंगे। ज्यादातर इनके क्लाइंट वही थे। नेशनल एड्स कंट्रोल ऑर्गनाइजेशन के मुताबिक देश में लगभग 9 लाख सेक्सवर्कर हैं। हालांकि, एआईएनएसडब्लू इस आंकड़ों को जमीनी हकीकत नहीं मानती हैं। उसके मुताबिक देश में सेक्स वर्कर की संख्या तीस लाख से भी ज्यादा है।

‘लॉकडाउन ने हमारे काम पर एकदम से ताला लगा दिया’

तर्क ये है कि इनमें घरेलू महिलाएं, प्रवासी महिलाएं और दिहाड़ी मजदूरी करने वाली महिलाओं की भी एक बड़ी तादाद शामिल है। उन्हीं महिलाओं में शामिल रांची की सोहानी भी हैं। कहती हैं- ‘लॉकडाउन ने हमारे काम पर एकदम से ताला लगा दिया है। हम किसी को कह भी नहीं

सकते कि हम क्या करते हैं, हमारा काम क्या है। किसी को पता नहीं है और हम कभी चाहते भी नहीं कि किसी को पता चले हमारे काम के बारे में।



रांची में यौनकर्मियों से मुलाकात करती हुई कांग्रेस विधायक दीपिका पांडे (ब्लैक साड़ी में) और मृगनयनी सेवा संस्थान की अध्यक्ष प्रतिमा कुमारी (ग्रे कलर की सूट में)।

सोहानी बीते दो साल से सेक्स वर्कर का काम करके न सिर्फ अपने दो बच्चों को पढ़ा रही हैं, बल्कि अपनी बुजुर्ग मां की देखभाल का जिम्मा भी उन्हीं पर है। एस्बेस्टस के एक कमरे में बाकी सेक्स वर्कर के साथ बैठी हुई सोहानी कहती हैं- ‘पति बहुत मारता- पीटता था। आठ साल पहले छोड़कर चला गया। फिर हमारे पापा भी मर गए। तब हम कलकत्ता में ही मजदूरी का काम करते थे। लेकिन वहां ठेकेदार कभी पैसा देता, कभी नहीं देता। पैसा मांगते तो गलत करने को कहता। फिर लोगों के यहां झाड़ू-पोछा किया, लेकिन इससे अपने दो बच्चों को पढ़ाना मुश्किल हो रहा था।’

पेट की मजबूरी और बच्चों की अच्छी परवरिश करने के लिए दो साल पहले कोलकत्ता से रांची आ गईं। सोहानी आगे कहती हैं- ‘तीन महीने से एक भी कस्टमर नहीं मिला है। घर भेजने के लिए पैसा भी नहीं है। अब तो रांची में घर का किराया देने के लिए भी मुश्किल हो रही है। कुछ लोगों ने सूखा राशन दिया था, नहीं तो भुखे मरना पड़ता।’

“लॉकडाउन ने परेशानियां पहले से और ज्यादा बढ़ा दीं”

रांची की रहने वाली बिंदिया देवी का पति 12 साल पहले परिवार को छोड़कर भाग गया था। तब से ही बिंदिया के कंधे पर परिवार के भरण-पोषण का बोझ है। बिंदिया कहती हैं- ‘लॉकडाउन ने परेशानियां पहले से और ज्यादा बढ़ा दी है। मुझे तीन बेटों और दो विवाहित

बेटियों और उनके बच्चों को देखना पड़ता है। पहले एक कंपनी में काम करती थी। लेकिन जब बीमार पड़ी तो उसने काम से हटा दिया। फिर लोगों के यहां झाड़ू-पोछा करने लगी, लेकिन उतने पैसों से इतने लोगों का पेट नहीं पाल सकते, इसलिए परिवार से लुकछुप कर यह काम करने लगी।' हर जगह से मिली नाउम्मीदी के बाद बिंदिया भी दो साल पहले इस पेशे में आई थीं, लेकिन कोरोना ने उनकी परेशानी बढ़ा दी। वो आगे कहती हैं- 'सब चीज तो पहले जैसी हो रही है और हो जाएगी, लेकिन हमारा क्या होगा, बच्चा बीमार है, उसका इलाज कहाँ से होगा?'

यौनकर्मियों को राशन वितरण करने के दौरान मृगनयनी सेवा संस्थान की अध्यक्ष प्रतिमा कुमारी। महिला और सेक्स वर्कर के अधिकारों के लिए काम करने वाली 'मृगनयनी सेवा संस्थान' की अध्यक्ष प्रतिमा कुमारी का कहना है कि कोरोना का संक्रमण जैसे-जैसे बढ़ेगा, सेक्स वर्कर की परेशानी भी बढ़ती जाएगी। अकेले झारखंड में यौनकर्मियों की संख्या 20 हजार से भी ऊपर है। पिछले साल हमारी संस्था ने झारखंड में 5500 को ट्रेस किया था। इसमें 600 से ज्यादा तो रांची में ही मिली थीं।

यौनकर्मियों की समस्याओं पर एआईएनएसडब्लू की अध्यक्ष कुसुम कहती हैं कि 'ये लोग मदद के लिए किसी से कुछ बोल भी नहीं सकती हैं, और उन तक कोई मदद पहुंचा भी नहीं पाता है। इनका काम फिजिकल होना ही होता है और कोरोना की वजह से कोई भी इनके पास नहीं आ रहा है। इनकी स्थिति भूखे मरने जैसी हो गई है। और अगर किसी दूसरे काम में जाना चाहेंगे तो जल्दी काम नहीं मिलेगा।

झारखंड स्टेट एड्स कंट्रोल सोसाइटी (जेएसएसीएस) का दावा है कि राज्य में सेक्स वर्कर की संख्या लगभग 10 हजार है। इन लोगों तक सरकारी स्कीमों की सर्विस पहुंचाई जा रही है। लॉकडाउन में भी एनजीओ के जरिए उन तक मदद पहुंचाई है, जैसे सूखा राशन, सैनिटाइजर और मास्क। इसके अलावा कोडिव-19 को लेकर लगातार काउंसलिंग भी कर रहे हैं।'

लेकिन रांची की ही प्रमिला कहती हैं उन्हें कुछ भी नहीं मिला। बच्चों की पढ़ाई के लिए लॉकडाउन से कुछ महीने पहले ही उसने 20 हजार रुपए लोन पर कर्ज लिया था। वो कहती हैं- 'सोचा था कर्ज कमाई से चुकता कर देंगे, बीते तीन महीने से एक भी ग्राहक नहीं मिला है। हम तो बाहर निकलकर राशन भी नहीं मांग सकते हैं। काम ऐसा करते हैं कि बता भी नहीं सकते किसी को। प्रमिला अपने बच्चों को पढ़ाई करवाने इस पेशे में आई थी। पति के निधन को 14 साल हो गए। बच्चे बहुत छोटे थे। दूसरों के यहां झाड़ू-पोछा करके अपना और अपने



बच्चों का पेट पाल लेती थी लेकिन जैसे-जैसे खर्च बढ़ा तो यह काम करना पड़ा। वो पूछती हैं अब क्या काम करें, हमें कौन काम देगा?

कोरोना से 95% सेक्स वर्कर बेरोजगार '

एआईएनएसडब्लू के नेशनल कॉर्डिनेटर अमित कुमार का कहना है कि कोविड ने देश के 95% से भी अधिक सेक्स वर्करों को बेरोजगार कर दिया है। आगे स्थिति और भयावह होने वाली है। कोविड के दौरान फिजिकल डिस्टेंसिंग के मानकों ने इनका काम लगभग ठप कर दिया है। जहां ये रहती हैं, वहां किराया न देने की वजह से धमकियां मिलने लगी हैं। घरेलू हिंसा और मानसिक तनाव के मामले भी बढ़े हैं, जिसकी शिकायत तक नहीं कर सकतीं।

एआईएनएसडब्लू की अध्यक्ष कुसुम कहती हैं, 'मैं एक आम नागरिक हूं तो सारी सुविधाएं मिलेगी लेकिन एक सेक्स वर्कर होकर कहीं कुछ लेने जाती हूं तो मुझे कुछ नहीं मिलेगा। जैसे ही मेरी पहचान सेक्स वर्कर के रूप में उजागर होती है वहीं पर मेरे सारे अधिकार खत्म हो जाते हैं। तब मैं एक मजबूर महिला, एक मां और बहन नहीं रह जाती हूं।



Md. Asghar Khan is a freelance journalist working in Jharkhand. In his seven years of experience, he has covered issue-based subjects focusing on tribals and minorities, crimes against women and the environment. His work has been published on various platforms and received several awards.

AS INDIA'S CREDIT SECTOR FALTERS, SO DO WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS

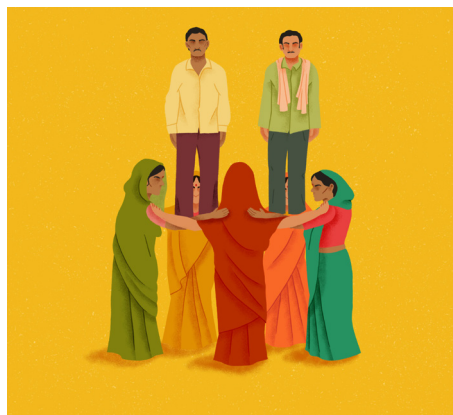
Mahima Jain

13 December 2020, fullerproject.org

The microfinance sector caters to income-insecure women with the promise of empowerment but most often women borrow to fund men's assets, household expenses.

The interest rates are high, but these previously "unbanked" women do not have other options to access credit. Lenders are now over-cautious since the repayment rates of previous loans have fallen. In India, loan disbursement by the microfinance sector fell by 97% in the April-June quarter compared to prior year. This leaves income-insecure families with no access to credit in times of need, particularly when incomes are volatile due to COVID-19. This will result in the resurrection of unregulated loan sharks.

In early March, 30-year-old Pinky Devi took out her latest small loan in the densely populated state of Bihar in northern India, where she lives with her husband and two sons. Like the other sums of rural credit Devi has borrowed over the last 12 years, the \$1,340 did not go to her work as a seamstress but instead to her breadwinner husband. Thirty-two-year-old carpenter Sunil Kumar Sharma needed to buy a motorcycle for his latest furniture business so he could zip around their village to take orders. Taking out the loan fell to his wife: In India, as it is around the world, most microfinancing is available primarily to women. As long as Sharma was working, they reasoned, paying back the steep weekly payment of \$40 would not be a problem. After all, the couple had used microfinancing to plug the gap in their finances for over a decade, and they had always managed to repay on time.



But a few weeks later, COVID-19 swept through India's heartland, forcing the whole country into lockdown. Devi's sewing orders instantly dried up and Sharma, like many in India, was taken by surprise by the government's last-minute decision to shut down. With only a few hours' notice, he didn't have time to collect his tools and materials to work from home. Getting to his workshop in town was impossible: it sits opposite the local police station, where officers strictly enforced the lockdown.

"All of a sudden his work stopped," Devi says over a video call in her bright pink home, where bare cement still covers most of the floors. "We worried what would happen if it continued, how would we repay our debts or even meet our expenses?"

The gap widens between men and women's access to opportunity Millions of income-insecure women in parts of rural India take on microfinance loans to fulfill the household needs — groceries, house repairs, seed money for their husbands' businesses — to counter economic downturn. Now, with less cashflow and more debt piling up during the pandemic, they are deferring loans with high rates that threaten their already fragile economic security and widening the gap between men and women's access to opportunity.

Set up in the 1980s, microfinancing was heralded as a champion of women's empowerment, extending cash to women who had never used or even visited a bank before. Devi took out a loan as part of a group of villagers. Dubbed the peer pressure model by the industry, lenders reach out to women in remote areas, and rely on the power of a dozen or more women to force each other to repay their loans on time. The women, who are allowed to take up to three loans of \$2,000, meet each week to collect weekly installments for the loan officer. It's in everyone's interest to ensure each member pays back their loans on time: if one defaults, the whole group could be denied future access to credit. But such social collateral can also become the system's Achilles heel.

Loan officers, say social workers on the ground, can become aggressive, showing up at a woman's doorstep without warning. Fights have broken out between lenders and families, and there has been violence within the groups, or even between the woman borrower and her husband. There have been instances of domestic violence following a loan officer's knock on a door. Apart from facing the ire of the group, many women take to

labouring for little wages, selling their jewellery or taking out exploitative informal loans. “There is a problematic reinforcement of patriarchy, even while arguing for women’s empowerment,” said Sohini Kar, who is an Associate Professor of International Development at London School of Economics, and has studied the socio-cultural dimensions of the microcredit sector.

Filling in the gaps of household expenses

Like many women across India, Devi’s loans have benefited her, but indirectly. On video, she proudly shows off her sewing machine, sitting besides an unpainted staircase that leads to an unfinished upper floor. Over the last decade, the house has been built in stages. Logs of wood, a half-finished bedframe and a headboard are neatly piled in different corners of the house. “Whenever we had money to spare, we would finish a different part of the house,” she says, her small golden earring and nose stud glistening in the early afternoon light. It was Devi’s borrowed credit that filled the gaps in household expenses. Her loans have financed repairs on the house, her husband’s furniture business, healthcare bills, and education for their two adolescent sons, both of whom she had when she was a teenager herself.

“Over 80 percent of the women borrowers are a front for the households and male members of the family to access these loans,” said Dr Supriya Garikipati, a development economist at the University of Liverpool whose work has found that women rarely use the loans to secure a livelihood. On paper, Devi could be borrowing for an entrepreneurial venture of her own design, but neither the banks nor India’s financial regulators care what her loan is used for. As long as the repayments are timely, her access to credit continues.

Her two sons study online through a smartphone since the family won’t be able to afford a computer this year. The rooftop terrace remains unfinished.

Though her debt has funded the house and her husband’s business, Devi is happy she lives in a better house than a decade ago. But she has hardly any assets to her own name. Devi was relieved when India announced a moratorium on repaying the loans four days after the late March lockdown came into effect. But nearly six months later, when the moratorium was lifted, her loan officer demanded she repay the credit

with the accumulated interest right away. The couple was flummoxed. “We were quite tense,” she says. The debt was too much to handle. “We paid back the initial installments from our savings.”

India has the largest microcredit clientele in the world — with more than 85% of its clients women — according to PricewaterhouseCoopers, and the industry is routinely called out for questionable lending policies. The most problematic came around 10 years ago when the suicide of 57 indebted farmers was linked to MFI practices. The industry emerged from the crisis with several reforms to regulate and control MFIs with strict rules on over lending, multiple lending, and caps on borrowing. But not all the changes have been implemented.

Stuck in a vicious cycle Devi was worried the women in her group would chide her for not having enough money to repay the loan. But in September, at her first in-person meeting after lockdown, she discovered that no one in the group would be in a position to pay. Interactions with the loan officer in recent weeks have become increasingly tense. He started showing up at the women’s weekly meetings, Devi said, demanding the loan be immediately repaid in a lump sum.

The Microfinance Institutions Network, the Indian association for the industry, said it believed borrowers across the country were “highly resilient”, its chief executive officer Alok Misra said in e-mailed answers. “In most cases, we are seeing a bounce back to normalcy as livelihoods are increasingly restored.” But Devi’s group is not the only ones who can’t pay. Before the pandemic, repayment rates in the microcredit sector were over 90% — a healthy amount that allowed the system to thrive. But this fell to 70% in August and 80% in September, according to industry lobby Sa-dhan. Experience from previous crises shows that a slip in repayments from 95% to below 85% would render MFIs insolvent in a year, according to Greta Bull, CEO of Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), a global think-tank on financial inclusion.

Post-lockdown, the confusion over repayments has worsened due to unclear policies, said Sajay Sinha, Executive Director of the microfinance analytics firm M-Cril. The government and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) were unclear about the moratorium’s terms, he explained. “Too much was left to the discretion of individual institutions, lenders, the big banks financing the sector and others,” Sinha said. Expecting poor borrowers

mostly from India's informal sector to repay the moratorium dues in full is problematic, he added. The RBI did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Some other countries came up with different solutions. In Pakistan, moratoria of a year was granted to borrowers for their principal payments. Kenya rescheduled personal loans without passing on any fees to the borrowers.

In India, the smaller lenders may collapse, Sinha says, and borrowers may face a crunch in credit access leading to the resurrection of informal money lending. The credit crunch is already underway: In the April-June quarter of 2020, the number of loans and the amount disbursed by Indian MFIs dropped by 97% as compared to the same period last year. Without an income, Devi's finances are stretched thin and if the couple experiences another setback — such as a second lockdown or family illness — they face becoming impoverished. Despite her current debts, Devi has no other option but to rely on rural credit. But she is stuck in a vicious cycle: she isn't able to repay, meaning she can't borrow again. If microcredit isn't available she will have to borrow from the exploitative and unregulated loan sharks. Successfully avoiding them has been a source of pride, but that could now be in jeopardy. Her husband has only now managed to start up work again.

"How will we mobilize those kinds of funds?" she wonders.



Mahima Jain is a Population Reference Bureau Women's Media Fellow (2020-2021) and a celebrated independent journalist. Her work has been featured in publications like The Guardian, The British Medical Journal, Deutsche Welle, Der Spiegel, Fuller Project, Mongabay, The Caravan etc. She has also received various grants and fellowships from Earth Journalism Network, International Women's Media Foundation, and several others.

FRONTLINE WORKERS EXPLAIN WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BLEED IN PROTECTIVE GEAR DURING COVID

Rituparna Chatterjee

15 May 2020, Youthkiawaaz.com

“Aapko pata hai, mai itni besharam ban gayi hoon in dinon, maine ek male doctor se duty exchange kiya aur unko maine bol diya, ‘mera periods hai, mai nahi kar paungi, aap karlo, I will do yours. (You know, I’ve become so shameless these days, I exchanged my duty with a male doctor and told him, ‘I’m on my period, I won’t be able to do it, I’ll do your duty, you do mine)’”, Dr Salma Khan, an anesthesiologist in medical Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Manipal Hospital in Jaipur, laughs as she narrates how she recently exchanged her duty with a male doctor on a particularly painful period day.

Dr. Khan and her colleagues across India are some of the frontline workers on duty round-the-clock right now, acting as the barrier between a catastrophic infection and its community spread. On an average day, she is on her feet for 12 hours at a stretch. On the first day of her period, it means wearing a sanitary pad for that long, suffering pain, and not getting a break to change or rest. She takes it in her stride as something she’s learnt to adjust to in her demanding profession, but it’s a daunting challenge nonetheless.

“After six hours in heavy bleeding, how will you manage? In lockdown we also wear PPEs (Protective Personal Equipment) because we come in contact with patients who might be Corona positive,” she says. “Of course I have stained my gown. There’s nothing we can do. What is the option? So I exchanged my duty with a male doctor and told him that as medicos, we should be able to talk about this freely,” she says.

The Covid-19 pandemic has called into work millions of frontline workers who are labouring round the clock to provide essential services to those in need. Many of these workers – and there are hundreds and thousands of them right now – are also dealing with a deeply personal struggle, invisibilized by others as a non-challenge because of its routine recurrence — that of managing their menstruation.

No Bathroom breaks : what wearing PPE and working for six hours in summer looks like

Dr. Archana B. is a pulmonologist at the Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), Bengaluru. She tests patients who come in with acute respiratory problems for Covid-19 everyday. On a regular day, she's on her feet for six to eight hours. The vivid picture she paints of the bodily discomfort women healthcare professionals go through during long and relentless Covid duties, is indicative of an unaddressed problem in the medical community.

"The PPEs are costly — around Rs 2000 each," Dr. Archana says over a phone call from Bengaluru. Which essentially means that the PPEs cannot be mishandled. More importantly, they cannot be taken off during the shift so as not to contract infection, which in turn means the doctors cannot use washrooms at that time. They will be sweating inside the PPEs, bleeding heavily but unable to get out of it till their shifts are over. Add to that dehydration — doctors try to train their bodies by not drinking water prior to their shift to avoid going to the bathroom.

"It's very difficult during the periods. It's not only the flow, there's a lot of discomfort also. Some of the women suffer from stomach pains and back pains," Dr. Archana says. "Because you cannot use washrooms while on Covid duty wearing PPEs, you cannot change your pad." What's also worrying for her is that hospital administrators who make duty rosters don't even give women an option to choose Covid duty days. If women menstruators who suffer from acute dysmenorrhea could select the dates of their Covid duty, then they'd work in some other non-isolation wards where PPE is not a requirement on those days, which would offer them at least some relief.

Dr. Archana says it's worrying that even women in decision making positions do not consider this a problem. The nursing staff face the same problem. The menstrual discomfort is increased many folds by dehydration, physical isolation, mental exhaustion, being in a PPE in sweltering heat, and genital rashes she says they are likely to get from wearing the same pad for long periods of time. The complete lack of acknowledgement of this when assigning duties, especially by men in charge, speak of a condition that is affecting hundreds of thousands of menstruators, but is not being mainstreamed into conversations.

When Duty Trumps All Else

In rural Madhya Pradesh, Anganwadi workers, paid a meagre Rs 10,000 a month, are walking in the peak of the May heat going door to door to reach ration, sanitary products, and other essentials to people, and to educate them about the risks of Covid 19. Babita Bhargava, one such Anganwadi worker in Vidisha, a city about 60 kms from the capital city of Bhopal, cannot imagine taking a day off for acute stomach cramps.

“Kya karein, duty toh karna hai na? (what to do, duty calls), Bhargava says. “We have to go into villages, it’s about six to seven hours of work, we keep spare pads in our bags. Thankfully, toilets are available at the Anganwadi centre,” she says. But some days stomach cramps, summer heat, and the work takes a toll. “I was out with a friend from Anganwadi who I could see could not even walk because of stomach cramps,” Bhargava, who surveys about 60-70 houses a day, says.

Anamika Devi Kurmi, an Anganwadi worker who has been on the job for 13 years, says supervisors will not even entertain the idea of period leave. “Leave is only for extreme illnesses — like if you are running a high fever. Periods come every month. It will be difficult explaining a period leave to supervisors,” she says.

When Using A Toilet Is Out Of Question

Things are tough for journalists too. On the road is Neelam Pandey, a journalist with The Print, who has been travelling across Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to chronicle stories of Covid. “When we had started off from Lucknow to Bihar, I got down. There were no washrooms available (because restaurants were also shut), so how do you go? It was quite painful for me. I had to use the toilets that were at the petrol pumps. One of them that I managed to get hold of, was quite dirty,” Pandey describes her ordeal. Not all petrol pumps opened their toilets. “There were no dustbins to even dispose of (the pad). I was carrying tissues, I wrapped it up, put it in a polythene, and carried it with me till I could find a bin,” she says. Even at these petrol pumps, she found only a single toilet open which was for men and women both. Pandey says she worried that on top of travelling in pain, she would stain her kurta too from long pad usage due to lack of a place where she could change.

Her travel took her to villages. “You can’t just go to someone’s house and say you want to use the loo. And at one time I even had to do that. There was no option,” she says. She kept encountering open urinals that were

suited for men. She speaks of women colleagues in similar situations who have had to relieve themselves in the middle of an open field because of lack of open toilets on the road during this time. Pandey raises the risk that poses to the personal safety of women.

Hindustan Times journalist Prachi Bari, based in Pune, has been going out during the lockdown to report. "I have been either going to the loo before I step out or I hold it in till I make it back home. It's very hot right now and the more you drink water, the more you want to go to the bathroom so I try to finish a story as soon as possible," Bari says. "I would not think of using a toilet outside during Covid. Sometimes in an emergency, we request the Pune Union of Working Journalists office to open the ladies toilet, but there are not many on the field," Bari says.

Manasi Saxena, a relief worker in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, has been working long hours to reach essentials to those hit by riots in North East Delhi during the NRC and CAA protests. When the lockdown was enforced, her work automatically shifted to providing relief to migrants and daily wagers. Her campaign ASHA has already raised 10,00,000.

With the general stress, she says her period stress has also gone up, a common enough problem around the world during times of disruption and trauma. Saxena, who runs an organisation called Encompassion, that works on strengthening communities through Nonviolent Communication (NVC), says her periods came earlier than they usually do, for the first time. She's never had an issue with her cycle. "I think the stress has gotten to me this time."



The lack of toilets is a glaring example of how city infrastructure doesn't keep menstruators in mind. "If you see the images (in news), it's mostly men who are outside. (And) it hasn't really occurred to make facilities for women," Pandey points out.

The lack of public facilities as menstruators step out to perform essential tasks during this lockdown, or migrant workers take the journey

home on foot with girls and children in tow, and callous lack of thought that goes into assigning work for women who are afraid to ask for a period leave fearing rebuke, makes it obvious that women's reproductive health isn't a priority in the struggle to keep them in the workforce.



Rituparna Chatterjee has been reporting on women's rights, feminism, politics and culture for two decades. Currently working as Deputy Asia Editor at The Independent and the India Representative of Reporters Without Borders, she has been conferred with the REX Karmaveer Global Fellowship and Karmaveer Chakra gold medal for her work on sexual violence. She was also listed in the Forbes 2019 list of W-Power Trailblazers.

COPING WITH PANDEMIC STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH AND MENSTRUAL DISORDERS IN 2020

Subhiksha Manoj & Bharti Kannan,
livewire.thewire.in

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare systems have faced a pivotal challenge. In India, catering to COVID-19 positive patients and conducting tests consumed the entire system with very little infrastructure, time and expertise allocated for other ailments, illnesses or even medical emergencies. While the battle to tackle the physical effects of COVID-19 are ongoing, the assistance we need to help with mental health has largely been self prescribed/aided by the media.

Articles on how to manage mental health during lockdown have been aplenty. Multiple circumstances have been explored and experts have shared their two cents. For example, if you are away from your family and home alone, here's what you can do; if you're having troubles separating your personal life from work in a WFH situation, this could help etc. There are two interesting aspects to this. One, all of the articles linked to above are borrowed from international media and our socio-cultural realities do not allow for its easy translation into our lives. Two, a very crucial enabler of declining mental health had been neglected – menstrual cycles.

This, however, is unsurprising considering both mental health and menstruation are taboo subjects – especially in India. Understanding menstrual cycles and mental health “All women are emotional and hormonal” is a sexist trope that has not only attached a double-edged sword to the way we engage with the link between menstrual cycles and mental health but has also ridiculed the effects of it. This pervasive slander and its marriage to the taboo associated with menses has affected the rate at which one can diagnose serious menstrual disorders like PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder), PCOS (Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome) and PME (Premenstrual Exacerbation).

Despite 1 in 20 women attesting to going through unpleasant experiences that affect physical and mental health before their period, PMS remains

the most under-studied in menstruation. About 90% women live with Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), however, PMSing is still largely associated with a woman's personality – “over emotional” – rather than a medical symptom that can get in the way of any menstruating person's wellbeing. Openly discussing the symptoms and ascertaining diagnosis is key to debunking this trope. At the moment, getting diagnosed for any of these disorders, especially PMDD is challenging. More than 90% of cases go undiagnosed.

Major menstrual disorders

Allopregnanolone, a chemical released by our brain, is said to be one of the main factors that trigger PMS symptoms. This chemical is released as a response to the spike in the progesterone (hormone that thickens the linings of the ovary) levels in our body post-menstruation. It acts as a sedative. When the progesterone levels plummet pre-menstruation, our brain is suddenly starved of allopregnanolone and “experiences a “come-down” – kind of like an endorphin hangover. This allopregnanolone hangover is what scientists believe contributes to the PMS symptoms of anxiety, irritability and mood disturbances.” PME and PMDD, on the other hand, are very clearly registered as disorders that can lead to suicidal thoughts. PMDD especially is not just a hormone related disorder but is listed aside mental health disorders like depression, bipolar and general anxiety. It can result in severe mood swings, anxiety and manifest into physical symptoms like body aches as well. These symptoms usually precedes the period by one or two weeks and is passed in the first few days of one's period. This is how one differentiates PME from PMDD. PME is the premenstrual exacerbation/worsening of the symptoms of another disorder, such as major depressive disorder or generalised anxiety disorder.

PCOS is also a hormone imbalance where LH secretion is high. This contributes to the high levels of androgens (male hormones) that causes infertility, obesity, excessive facial hair in women. The mental wellbeing of people who live with PCOS is severely affected because one “can't treat PCOS effectively unless we pay close attention to any signs of mental distress”.

Experiences of people living with menstrual disorders during lockdown
The COVID-19 lockdown, coupled with mass unemployment, economic indebtedness, domestic violence and alcohol abuse had left India at the

brim of a mental breakdown. "At-risk populations include the 150 million with pre-existing mental health issues, COVID-19 survivors, frontline medical workers, young people, differently abled people, women, workers in the unorganised sector, and the elderly," says Nelson Vinod Moses, a leading suicide prevention advocate in India.

Women and menstruating individuals in our country were not prepared to respond to the storm caused by the socio-economic failures of the state which collided with the pre-existing symptoms of menstrual disorders. It is deeply concerning to think about the state of mind of individuals living with chronic stress, depression, anxiety and other symptoms of menstrual disorders but are yet to be diagnosed.

Even if the menstruators are prepared to seek help, India's formal mental health system has merely 9,000 counsellors and therapists available for 1.3 billion people. Large volunteer based orgs like Let's Talk, with over 300 volunteers, are also "acutely aware that it is impossible to provide long-term support to the community." Shekar Saxena, former director of the WHO's Mental Health Division, says, "Mental health systems have always been very scanty in India and during this time, the gap between what is needed and what is available has widened markedly." Irrespective of the age, occupation or socio-economic backgrounds, the stories of people living with menstrual disorders during the lockdown have mostly been one of distress. "My shift at the hospital changes every day, so my sleep schedule is completely messed up. The fact that I am always scared and worried about risking myself while putting my whole family in danger creates a lot of stress and anxiety. As a result, my periods in the last few months have always been delayed. My mood swings have started fluctuating a great deal owing to the PMS of a delayed period," says, Rushali*, a young doctor interning at a hospital in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh.

"As a person living by themselves with two hormonal disorders – PCOS and PMDD, I rely heavily on my support system to get through life. Lockdown created a dissonance and exacerbated the existing dysphoria these conditions subject me to.

There were days of heightened depression and all my coping mechanisms to regulate hormones organically (endorphins and oxytocin) – running, swimming, physical support were unavailable. Getting psychiatric

medicine (antidepressants and mood stabilisers) on e-prescriptions was not easy and further complicated the situation. The lockdown was undoubtedly the toughest episode of my poor mental health, and the first when I thought about ending my life,” says Sonal Jain, co-founder of Boondh. “Going out used to be an escape from the toxic environment of my house. Now that I am stuck in the house I have to work a lot. It has majorly affected my mental health and period cycle. PCOS, already used to create a lot of problems but in the last couple of months my period stays for more than a week, are often delayed and are excruciatingly painful,” says Eshitaa Mudgal, a 22-year-old from Delhi who lives with PCOS.

However, some are using the lockdown to try and navigate a better way to deal with the effects of living with these disorders. “I was heavily dependent on birth-control pills for a year and half but taking note of how adversely it was affecting my physical and emotional well-being, I stopped. Until college, I was not eating healthy, doing any form of physical activity or controlling the intake of external stimulants which were only worsening the problem.

After coming home, I decided to make things better, a good diet, exercise and maintaining a healthy lifestyle are the only ways to treat PCOS so the sooner one adapts to the change, the better it will be,” says a fresh graduate, Ishani Vats. According to an article in The Print, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (National Adolescent Health programme) has made significant changes in its interventions since February this year. The scheme has included counsellors, facility-based counselling, and the concept of social and behavioural change. However, there is limited evidence on the roll out and implementation of these initiatives. Biological processes that include the life cycle of a menstruating body from menarche to menopause needs to be considered while designing such schemes.

This must be in sync with the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists Recommendation that recommends menstrual health as the sixth vital sign for assessing health, programmes and interventions, especially on mental health also need to take cognisance of the same.

It is time the government and civil society addressed the mental well being of the people in our country by taking an intersectional approach

to helping frontline workers, underserved communities, women, LGBTQIA+ community. This is paramount at a time where socio-cultural and economic realities have a close relationship with the mental health individuals. It is not only important to explore and openly discuss the need for psychoanalysis, it is necessary to acknowledge that the key towards a healthy lifestyle is in destigmatising taboo topics that have linkages to mental health, like menstruation.



Subhiksha Manoj is a journalism graduate and a keen advocate for social change. She contributes extensively towards gender, environment, education, and humanitarian concerns. She is an enthusiastic advocate for social change and has worked with Boondh for menstrual advocacy. She is currently pursuing her masters in Environment, Politics and Development at SOAS.



Bharti Kannan is a GAP Fellow, Action For India Fellow and a Priyadharshini Achiever's Awardee. Bharti founded Boondh in 2016 with a vision to drive change towards better gender, health and environmental outcomes. Currently, she is one of the Chairperson's of the Interagency Working Group (IAWG) on ASRH- Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health.





REPORTING ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & DISCRIMINATION

Globally, India is known to be one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women. Considering the fact that the country ranks very low in the gender equality index, women continue to face discrimination in all aspects of life. Violence against women is deep-rooted in unequal power and gender relations, which transcend social and economic boundaries, affecting women and girls of all socio-economic backgrounds. Unfortunately, research shows that although media reports on violence against women almost daily, reporting is sensational and doesn't address the root causes. Furthermore, the media focuses on individual violence cases against women rather than addressing the problem in its social context. This section highlights stories and issues that are accurate and sensitive to educate the public better and help bring awareness about the issue.

Dr. Monika Sharma draws attention to the very basis of discrimination against women in her award-winning editorial, 'सोच बदलने से रुकेगी हिंसा'. She cites the main reason as the mindset of men, patriarchy, which allows gender-inequitable attitudes as drivers of violence against women. With statistics revealing that two-thirds of women in India are victims of violence, Dr. Monika emphasizes that serious efforts must be needed to eradicate violence.

Sagar Galani, in his article, 'As Capitalism Fuels Toxic Masculinity, Time to Call Ourselves Out', points at the deep-rooted capitalist culture that

promotes toxic behaviour among men. He refers to recent chats named “Bois locker room” to exemplify the pressure to indulge in “masculine” tasks by boys to prove their superiority. The author recognizes how exercising patriarchy and its prerogatives gives men a sense of entitlement which develops into behaviour that encourages audacity and dominance.

In her article, ‘Rhea: The face of our broken mirror’, Sudarshana Chakraborty points to the declining state of reason-intellect-consideration by citing the tagging of the name of Rhea Chakraborty in actor Sushant Rajput’s death. She describes how patriarchal society does not waste any time attaching labels on bodies of ‘independent women’.

Hrishita Rajbangshi, in her article, ‘Possessed by greed - The enduring human toll of Assam’s Witch Hunts’, shares multiple stories of women accused of witch-hunting and the atrocities they, along with their families, have to endure.

Tasneem Khan, in her Hindi feature, ‘घरेलु हिंसा पर कब लगेगा लॉकडाउन? आधी दुनिया, पुरी बात’, states that 33% of women in India face domestic violence. She provides a detailed picture across the country by listing statistics from every state on domestic violence cases. The internalized misogyny of the women in the country is reflected through the data that reveals that about 45% of Indian women agree that a husband or partner is justified in beating his wife or partner under certain circumstances.

Nandhini.V, in her article ‘Metropolitan Fisherwomen : Story of Kasimedu women’, showcases this mindset in her video feature by bringing to the forefront the day to day challenges faced by Kasimedu fisherwomen. Her video report shares the struggles of these fisherwomen to sustain their livelihood, their misfortune with alcoholic husbands and the numerous issues they face due to the financial crisis.

Feminists and activists have been fighting to end discriminatory practices against women for a long time. The article by Sharanya Manivannan, ‘Desire and gender in two novels about hereditary dancers’ describes how the burden of stigma still haunts them in different ways. Amchi Urmila, a community radio show, focuses on the issue of early child marriage in their show titled, ‘Ending Child Marriage’. It spreads the message through the sensitive story of a brave girl named Rupa who voices her anguish against her planned wedding. The pressure to

marry escalates soon after a girl starts menstruating. For some girls, their periods mean the end of their education and the beginning of a lifetime of marriage, pregnancies, domestic work and even violence. Prashant Pratyush, in the article, 'कैसे इन पीरियड्स ने मुझे, एक लड़के को, पितृसत्तात्मक बना दिया', points out that the onset of periods not only brings about a dramatic change in the lives of girls, but it also affects boys.

He indicates that rarely are boys explained about periods, sowing the seeds of patriarchy in them. Jahid Khan, in his article, 'महिलाओं के प्रति इस मानसिकता को क्या कहिएगा', writes about the rules for women during menstruation. He highly condemns the "two-finger test" to determine the virginity/consent of the victim in a rape case. Similar experiences are documented by Rudra Prassana Rath in his article, 'Why marriages fail' that talks about the various stages that a woman goes through to get married. He points out the flimsy reasons given by the prospective groom and his family during the process of 'bride selection. He highlights the unnecessary expenses incurred by the woman's family, and the impact of frequent rejections on a woman's self image and mental health.

Women continue to face discrimination and violence even after marriage. The recent National Family Health Survey states that 83% of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 who have ever suffered sexual abuse cite their current husband as the perpetrator. Bijaya Biswal brings forth chilling accounts of the gruesome violence that women face. In his article, 'Wedding Season brings more women to the hospital with injuries from rape', he covers the concept of girls consent and the absence of laws favouring victims of sexual abuse in marriage. Dr. Shantanu Abhyankar in, 'A Mother Dies' captures the plight of a pregnant tribal woman who died due to injuries suffered while facing beating from her husband for serving a bland curry to him. Purnima Sah, in her article, 'Women Safety: A dysfunctional toll-free women helpline in West Bengal; Assam helpline lacks sufficient funds,' includes stories of two women from West Bengal who faced domestic violence for many years and remain unaware of the existence of a toll-free number to reach out for help. She successfully brings forth the harsh reality of the dysfunctional, understaffed and cash strapped helplines in these states. C. Vanaja, in her article, 'From Nirbhaya to Disha- Growing Rape Culture and Solutions without Searching Root Causes' talks about the growing rape culture that has shaken the middle class and the millennium generation, leaving them

with a sense of anger, frustration, and helplessness. The article shares the findings of the Justice Verma committee to look at rape as something beyond crime and punishment and look at it as a gender-related crime. It also points to a skewed viewpoint that gender violence is restricted to a specific society- poor in particular. Aishwarya Amritvijayraj's web feature, 'महिलाओं के 'चरमसुख' यानी ऑर्गेज़म पर चुप्पी नहीं बात करना ज़रूरी है' speaks about the rather unspoken topic of female orgasm. The author presents a detailed account of female orgasm - and the various myths associated with it.

Of the total crimes recorded against women in 2020 by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), kidnapping and abduction constituted about 20%. TV9 Telugu, in their video report, 'Women trafficking in the Anantapur-Kadapa-Chittoor belt', highlights the human trafficking situation across the Anantapur-Kadapa-Chittoor belt. The report finds that women from this belt are taken to Gulf countries on the pretext of housework and sexually exploited. TV9 Telugu and Saumya Jyotsna point out the lax approach of authorities towards such cases.

Saumya, in her article, 'नवरूणा केस : अब अपनी बेटी के अवशेष का इंतज़ार कर रहे हैं माता-पिता', gives a detailed account of the investigation of Navruna's kidnapping and murder. She rightly points out that the pain of Navruna's parents can only be understood by those who have lost their children.

Similar to this case, Ismat Ara, in her investigative report, 'Aligarh Hospital MLC Report on Hathras Victim Shatters UP Police's 'No Rape' Claim', highlights the shortcomings in Hathras rape investigation. She exposes the inexplicable delay in sexual assault forensic investigation and the neglect of duty at all levels.

In contrast to all the award-winning entries, Puja Awasthi's article, 'Burns and Bias' looks at the male survivors of acid attacks' points to a skewed female-centric lens for acid attack victims. Community, government, judiciary and even the police- all presume that females are the only victims of acid attacks. In addition, the article highlights the problems and struggles that male acid attack victims face concerning compensation, disability certificates and police response.

PRINT & WEB MEDIA

सोच बदल ने से रुकेगी हिंसा

डॉ. मोनिका शर्मा

25 नवंबर 2020, दैनिक हरिभूमि

आज महिलाएं बाहर ही नहीं घर के भीतर भी सुरक्षित नहीं हैं। उनके साथ हिंसा और प्रताड़ना की घटनाएं दुनियाभर में चिंता का विषय हैं। दरअसल, महिलाओं के साथ होने वाली हिंसा के बीज उस मानसिकता से पोषित होते हैं, जिसमें उन्हें मनुष्य होने का मान ही नहीं दिया जाता। जरूरत इस बात की है कि सामाजिक सोच में बदलाव आए। हर स्तर पर औरतों को दोयम दर्जा देने की मानसिकता जड़ से खत्म की जाए। आधी आबादी के लिए घर के भीतर और बाहर सुरक्षित माहौल बनाने के लिए विचार और व्यवहार के धरातल पर बदलाव जरूरी हैं। संस्कार और संवेदनाओं को पोषित किए बिना यह सिलसिला नहीं रुकेगा।

संवेदनाओं और सोच के धरातल पर आज भी महिलाओं के प्रति शोषण और दोयम दर्जे की सोच बरकरार है। भारत ही नहीं दुनियाभर में महिलाओं के प्रति घरेलू हिंसा, मानसिक प्रताड़ना और उत्पीड़न की घटनाएं बढ़ रही हैं। कोरोना काल में भी घरेलू हिंसा और मानसिक प्रताड़ना की घटनाएं हमारे देश ही नहीं दुनिया के हर हिस्से से सामने आए हैं। भारत में तो आइसोलेशन केंद्रों में मरीजों के साथ दुष्कर्म और छेड़छाड़ जैसे मामले भी सामने आए हैं। कहना गलत नहीं होगा कि कोरोना की जिस आपदा ने जीवन को एक अन्य सिरे से समझने का अवसर दिया है, उस संकट के दौर में भी महिलाओं के साथ हुई ऐसी अमानवीय घटनाएं औरतों के प्रति मौजूद विकृत सोच की ही बानगी बनी हैं।

गौरतलब है कि अंतरराष्ट्रीय महिला हिंसा उन्मूलन दिवस के लिए साल 2020 का विषय भी इस महामारी से उपजी स्थितियों से ही जुड़ा है। ऑरेंज द वर्ल्ड-फंड, रिस्पोंड, प्रीवेंट, कलेक्ट इस वर्ष की थीम है। जो कोविड के प्रकोप के बाद से, महिलाओं व लड़कियों के खिलाफ सभी प्रकार की हिंसा, विशेष रूप से घरेलू हिंसा के बढ़ने से जुड़ी रिपोर्ट्स को लेकर काम करने का उद्देश्य लिए है। इसके तहत कोविड-19 महामारी के बढ़ते संकट के बीच महिलाओं के विरुद्ध हो रही हिंसा को रोकने के लिए वैश्विक स्तर पर सामूहिक प्रयास की जरूरत पर जोर दिया

जा रहा है। यह विषय कोरोना के दौर में महिलाओं के खिलाफ हिंसा को संबोधित करने को प्राथमिकता देने और आधी आबादी की सुरक्षा को लेकर गंभीर प्रयास किए जाने की जरूरत से जुड़ा है।

घर के भीतर हों या बाहर, आधी आबादी के साथ हो रही हिंसक घटनाओं के आंकड़े संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ के लिए भी चिंता का विषय बने हुए हुए हैं। गौरतलब है कि स्त्रियों के प्रति होने वाली हिंसा के उन्मूलन के लिए आज का खास दिन मनाया जाता है। अंतरराष्ट्रीय महिला हिंसा उन्मूलन दिवस, दुनिया के हर कोने में आधी आबादी के विरुद्ध हिंसा रोकने, जागरूकता लाने और संवेदनशील परिवेश बनाने की कोशिशों पर विमर्श का दिन होता है। ऐसी योजनाओं को व्यावहारिक धरातल पर उतारने के प्रयासों को बल दिया जाता है, जो हर उम्र की औरतों को शारीरिक-मानसिक प्रताड़ना से बचाने में कारगर हो सकते हैं। विचारणीय है कि असुरक्षा के ऐसे हालात महिलाओं से जीने का सहज और सकारात्मक परिवेश भी छीन रहे हैं। संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ के मुताबिक महिलाओं के खिलाफ हिंसा मानवाधिकार का उल्लंघन है जिसका सबसे अहम कारण उनके प्रति भेदभाव की मानसिकता है। व्यापक रूप से देखा जाए तो संस्कारहीन सोच और संवेदनाओं से रीत रहा मन ही ऐसी विकृत, हिंसक और भेदभाव भरी मानसिकता को पोषण दे रहे हैं। यही वजह है कि हमारे समाज में घर के बाहर तो महिलाओं की सुरक्षा और सम्मान एक बड़ा सवाल है ही, दहलीज के भीतर भी हालात कुछ अच्छे नहीं हैं। कुछ समय पहले आई यूएन वर्ल्ड पापुलेशन फंड और इंटरनेशनल सेंटर फॉर रिसर्च ऑन वीमेन की रिपोर्ट में देश के 7 राज्यों में किए गए सर्वे के मुताबिक आज भी 10 में से 6 मर्द अपनी पत्नी के साथ हिंसक व्यवहार करते हैं। ऐसे आंकड़े हमारे समाज और परिवार का वो स्याह चेहरा दिखाते हैं जहां स्त्रियां अपने ही आंगन में, अपने ही लोगों की हिंसा झेलने को विवश हैं।

इस रिपोर्ट में 60 फीसदी पुरुषों ने स्वीकारा है कि वे अपनी पत्नी के साथ हिंसक बर्ताव करते हैं। ऐसे आंकड़े दहलीज के भीतर होने वाले स्त्रियों के भावनात्मक और शारीरिक उत्पीड़न का खुलासा करने को काफी है। यूनाइटेड नेशन्स की एक रिपोर्ट के अनुसार भी भारत में दो तिहाई महिलाएं हिंसा का शिकार हैं। इतना ही नहीं 2009 में राष्ट्रीय परिवार स्वास्थ्य सर्वेक्षण की रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक हमारे देश में 40 फीसदी महिलाएं रोज किसी न किसी बहाने पति की मारपीट का शिकार बनती हैं। कुछ समय पहले आई यूनिसेफ की एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक देश में 15 से 19 साल की 25 लाख शादीशुदा लड़कियां कभी न कभी यौन और भावनात्मक हिंसा का शिकार हुई हैं। इतना ही नहीं रंजिश के चलते प्रतिशोध की भावना से भी महिलाओं से दुर्व्यवहार के मामले सामने आते हैं। महिलाओं से बेहूदगी के वीडियो बनाकर सोशल मीडिया पर पोस्ट, ऑनलाइन ट्रोलिंग व साइबर क्राइम जैसे अपराध भी दंश बने हुए हैं। समाज में

मौजूद संवेदनहीनता और स्त्रियों के प्रति भेदभाव भरी सोच का ही नतीजा है कि प्रेम या शादी जैसे मसले पर उनकी असहमति भर एसिड अटैक और सामूहिक दुष्कर्म जैसी बर्बर घटनाओं का कारण बन जाती है। ऐसे में समझना मुश्किल नहीं कि हिंसा उन्मूलन के लिए गंभीर प्रयास किए जाने की दरकार है।

संयुक्त राष्ट्र के महिलाओं के सशक्तीकरण, सुरक्षा के क्षेत्र में कार्य करने वाले महिला प्रभाग के मुताबिक दुनिया भर में औरतें मानसिक और दैहिक पीड़ा को झेलने को विवश हैं। संयुक्त राष्ट्र के आंकड़ों के मुताबिक दुनिया भर में लगभग 15 करोड़ किशोर लड़कियां अपने जीवन में कभी-न-कभी यौन उत्पीड़न का शिकार होती हैं। हिंसा की शिकार 50 प्रतिशत से अधिक महिलाओं की हत्या उनके परिजनों द्वारा ही की जाती है। 3 अरब महिलाएं वैवाहिक बलात्कार की शिकार होती हैं। हालात इतने भयावह हैं कि वैश्विक स्तर पर मानव तस्करी के शिकार लोगों में 50 फीसदी वयस्क महिलाएं हैं। डब्ल्यूएचओ के मुताबिक हर दिन 3 में से 1 महिला शारीरिक हिंसा झेलती हैं।

चिंतनीय है कि कोविड-19 की विपदा ने महिलाओं के लिए हिंसा की स्थितियां और बढ़ा दी हैं। देखा जाए तो बाहर ही नहीं घर में भी औरतों को लेकर मानसिकता में खास बदलाव नहीं आया है। मौजूदा दौर में घर के कामकाज के साथ-साथ औरतों को बाहर की जिम्मेदारी तो मिल गई पर उसके आत्मसम्मान और अस्तित्व की मोल आज भी कुछ नहीं आंका जाता। पत्नी पर हाथ उठाना या तानेबाजी करना कई पुरुष अपना हक समझते हैं। कभी दहेज के कभी बेटी को जन्म देने का उलाहना देने के नाम पर महिलाओं को ससुराल वालों और पति का दुर्व्यवहार झेलना पड़ता है। आम धारणा है कि जो महिलाएं कामकाजी हैं, वे घरेलू हिंसा का शिकार नहीं होतीं। 2005-06 में हुए एक सर्वे में यह बात सामने आ चुकी है नौकरी करने वाली लगभग 80 फीसदी महिलाओं को गृहिणियों की तुलना में पति की ज्यादातियों का ज्यादा शिकार होना पड़ता है। अपने साथी द्वारा किये गए शारीरिक और यौन दुर्व्यवहार की शिकार 42 फीसदी महिलाएं चोटिल हो जाती हैं।

दरअसल, महिलाओं के साथ होने वाली हिंसा के बीज उस मानसिकता से पोषित होते हैं, जिसमें उन्हें मनुष्य होने का मान ही नहीं दिया जाता। जरूरत इस बात की है कि सामाजिक सोच में बदलाव आए। हर स्तर पर औरतों को दायम दर्जा देने की मानसिकता जड़ से खत्म की जाए। आधी आबादी के लिए घर के भीतर और बाहर सुरक्षित माहौल बनाने के लिए विचार और व्यवहार के धरातल पर बदलाव जरूरी हैं। संस्कार और संवेदनाओं को पोषित किए बिना यह सिलसिला नहीं रुकेगा।



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AS CAPITALISM FUELS TOXIC MASCULINITY, TIME TO CALL OURSELVES OUT

Sagar Galani

13 May 2020, thequint.com

Capitalism & Toxic Masculinity (& its Impact During a Pandemic)

We live in a capitalist world, and there's no denying that; the structure is inherently competitive. When we are so focused on getting "more," we build hierarchies so that we're not on the bottom level, which can sometimes result in problematic behaviour, like toxic masculinity. The deep-rooted capitalist culture severely impacts our perspective on checkboxes we must attain to 'move up the ladder.' This mindset allows us to normalize toxic behaviour like shaming other men for not conforming to gender stereotypes or creating Instagram groups where women are objectified ('Bois Locker Room').

As the global economy begins to face a large slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it's important to understand how capitalism fuels toxic masculinity and how we can limit its manifestation.

Toxic Masculinity a Problem that Needs to be Discussed On a global scale, toxic masculinity is used to generalize sexism and any form of male aggression. The term allows us to distinguish toxic traits like aggression and violence from healthy ones. It also allows us to recognize that masculinity itself is not the sole cause of male-incited violence. Toxic masculinity needs to be discussed because it is the root cause for a significant number of crimes globally including domestic violence, murder, and assault. The National Commission of Women has already announced that it has received double the number of domestic violence complaints during the first 25 days of the lockdown than previous periods. Toxic masculinity is real and can have a crippling impact on us, regardless of where we come from.

Capitalism Fuels Toxic Masculinity by Building Social Hierarchies

Capitalism's focus on moving up a hierarchy to achieve success can directly be linked to more selfish and goal-oriented behaviour; it's not necessarily a bad thing but it can make us care less about others. This

mindset impacts the way we judge others and ourselves. A man who is 'feminine' is made fun of because he is different and unwanted in the 'professional club.' How often do a group of men in an office mock each other for speaking softly or feeling anxious? Personally, I spent a large amount of time 'un-feminizing' the way I laughed, walked, and spoke so that I could avoid this mockery and become "successful."

In his book "Healing from Hate," Michael Kimmel argues that men who were involved in violent political acts felt that "they had not received what they had expected to gain through the virtue of being a man." Essentially, the belief that they had not received the "capital" they were entitled to meant that they had to take extreme measures to obtain it. The goals given to us by capitalism are that we should accumulate the most amount of wealth. If I cannot achieve that, I start believing that I'm not manly and I need to do "more" to take control of my life. Sometimes, this "more" can translate to healthy actions of discipline, but a lot of the times it can also manifest into the development of toxic traits like aggression, violence, or bullying. The 'Bois Locker Room' incident is a clear example of young boys feeling like they need to do "more" to prove their masculinity. This desire allowed these boys to normalize the horrific crime of sharing photos of underage women.

Limiting the Manifestation of Toxic Masculinity Requires Us to Call Ourselves Out We must identify and address toxic behaviour around us, even if they don't seem extreme. The best way to deal with this is by having a conversation about those actions with a mental health professional. Being in stressful situations while working from home can result in toxic behaviour: being slightly rude to family members or feeling too entitled to help with household chores. While these actions may not seem as drastic as domestic violence or an obscene Instagram group, they are still toxic and must be addressed through conversations.

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to identifying toxic traits within others and ourselves. Personally, I know that my motivation for succeeding in a capitalist world has made me develop biases that I need to be more aware of. Writing this article made me think about all the times I could have been complacent in the mockery of others who were not 'masculine enough.' Just because I was a victim of toxic masculinity doesn't mean I don't possess those traits myself. We need to start calling ourselves out to limit the manifestation of toxic masculinity. As we deal with one of

the most stressful times in our capitalist society, it's easy for us to feel a lack of "control." It's important for us to identify toxic traits by engaging in productive conversations so that we don't engage in unproductive behaviour searching for that "control".



Sagar Galani's writing focuses on gender inequality and toxic masculinity in Indian media and society. He has completed his Bachelors in Applied Economics from Cornell University and his Masters from the London School of Economics. His work has been published across multiple platforms.

RHEA : THE FACE OF OUR BROKEN MIRROR

Sudarshana Chakraborty

19 September 2020, groundxero.in

One thing needs to be made very clear at the outset: Rhea Chakraborty is nothing but a pawn on a chessboard. So is Kangana Ranaut, her chief detractor. Many understand the whole picture yet refuse to acknowledge the same. Doing so ends the excitement and forces the people to face a few urgent questions. It forces them to look at the country's current political, social, and economic situation.

A tragic death has been shamelessly used for the last seven months amidst a raging pandemic. A female character has been placed at the centre of the controversy to add excitement. A nausea-provoking atmosphere has been created throughout the country to shift focus from the state's utter failure. A 'surreal' situation, like a stage show, where the magician PC Sarkar magically made the entire Taj Mahal disappear in front of our eyes, has been created. The whole country has been put under a magical spell while dealing with a challenging situation like the pandemic. Totally spellbound and immersed in a thrilling drug-murder-mystery as they question a woman's character. A woman whose social life, career, relationships, everything, literally everything, has been laid bare and put up for public consumption for twenty-four hours, seven days a week. Rhea Chakraborty fits perfectly into this equation. She has no choice!

Sushant Singh Rajput, a young Bollywood actor's untimely tragic death, gave the present government and the opposition parties an opportunity. Unfortunately, the incident had no exciting elements to make it thrilling to the public. Murder or suicide, drugs, money laundering, multiple women in his life, love vs sex, lover's conflict with his family, and friends' role were all available for the media to make headlines. These elements were sleazy enough to be presented to the public continuously for twenty-four hours, every day of the week. The Indian state and the government's failure to deal with the pandemic, death of migrant workers, farmer suicides, and the near-collapse of the country's economy were incidents pushed to the background. The government suppressed any voices against them and arrested activists and social workers during the Delhi riots while the

real culprits were left off. Instead, the state-media nexus buried all these episodes through a well-hatched plan of public brainwashing. The likes of Rhea Chakraborty just get used in such scenarios.

(Translated from Bengali to English)



Sudarshana Chakraborty is a journalist, a documentary film maker & a gender activist with special focus on gender rights, labour rights & disability. As a researcher, content creator, translator, Sudarshana has worked for CREA, Sruti Disability Research Centre, Pratyay Gender Trust, Sanhita, etc. Her documentaries were screened at various film festivals.

POSSESSED BY GREED - THE ENDURING HUMAN TOLL OF ASSAM'S WITCH HUNTS

Hrishita Rajbangshi

1 October 2020, The Caravan

Birubala Rabha braved a social boycott to raise awareness about witch hunting and support survivors. "This process will never come to an end," Lakhyamati Daimary told me. "For as long as you make sure that the villagers keep believing in daina-daini"—the Bodo term for witches—"you don't need any other way to fool them to get your work done."

In 2014, Lakhyamati, a cook at a primary school in Jangalgaon, a village in Assam's Udalguri district, was accused of practising witchcraft. "My brother in-law said that my daughter's friend had been possessed by Aai Goxani"—a goddess associated with smallpox, also called Sheetala—"and that she had claimed I was a witch, who would wreak havoc in the entire village," she said. "How does a 16-year-old girl claim such things and the villagers believe her? You tell me." Lakhyamati did not take the accusation seriously at first, she added, "but then the villagers started coming to our house one after the other." They attacked the family, severely injuring her husband and four children, and burned down their house. At a public meeting, Lakhyamati was forced to eat human excreta as punishment. The villagers demanded she leave the village with her children, or they would kill the entire family.

Although the family left for a relative's house in Kokrajhar, they returned to Jangalgaon a month later, with the local police and the All Bodo Students' Union helped them resettle despite widespread opposition. Most of their assailants fled the village for a few months, and no arrests were made.

Their case is pending in the high court. "We are still trying to forget the atrocities that were inflicted upon us," Nandeshwar, Lakhyamati's eldest son, told me. "We are still in the process of bringing normalcy to our day-to-day life." Sonamoni Basumatary, a resident of Udalguri's Sapkhaiti village, faced a similar ordeal. On 28 September 2014, her family was surrounded by their fellow villagers in the local church.

Her brother-in-law's daughter was suffering from dengue, and claimed she had dreamt that her aunt had caused her to fall ill using witchcraft. Again, nobody questioned her claim, and the Basumatary family was told that they would be killed if they did not leave the village. "I had lived in this village all my life, and I had to leave the place within the next two hours," Sonamoni's husband, Prafulla, a retired college principal, told me. "I was asked to never come back." The family moved to the distant village of Bhairabkunda, near the Bhutan border. Although they filed a police complaint, they did not pursue the case further. "We believe in forgiving," Prafulla said. "We have forgiven them in spite of the fact that they took everything from us." His brother, who made the accusation, occupied the property they left behind in Sapkhaiti.

As news of their ostracism spread through the regional media, their daughter Hemi, an engineer who lives in the district town of Udalguri, began facing trouble buying a house, as no one was willing to sell to the daughter of a woman accused of witchcraft. According to data collected by the Assam government, 77 people were killed, and 60 injured, in 93 cases of witch-hunting between 2010 and 2015.

Many more have been hounded out of their villages after being attacked by their neighbours. Over the course of my research, I studied over a dozen police complaints filed in the districts of Goalpara, Udalguri and Kokrajhar, and met eight women who had been accused of witchcraft. Their harrowing testimonies confirmed recent findings that, although superstition—as well as a lack of healthcare and education facilities—plays a part in the persistence of witch-hunts in the twenty-first century, personal feuds and rivalries fuelled by property ownership are the primary reasons.

It often took me several hours to track down survivors. Many of the families had never dared to go back to their villages, abandoning their property, despite assurances by the police and organisations that work with survivors. Raja Soren and his wife, Jeta—daily-wage labourers from Balajan—fled their village after five men killed his mother, Komila Murmu, on the night of 24 March 2017.

Nobody could tell me where they were. The inspector in charge at the local police outpost said that Raja had returned a few times to cooperate

with their investigation but had not contacted the police after the five men were acquitted. The couple never returned to sell off the house in which they had lived.

It lay abandoned, and the police suspected the villagers had stolen their cattle. Gopal Gaur, who works at a tea estate near the village of Sonapani, tried to explain the financial toll of having to move after a traditional healer accused his wife, Sumitra, cursed a sick child. I had been directed to Sonapani by Sumitra's relatives, who were looking after the property the couple left behind in Amlaiguri. One of their neighbours had attacked Sumitra with a machete, injuring her hand, and the other residents threatened to kill them if they did not leave the village. The two of them cumulatively earned less than three hundred rupees a week, Gopal told me, so uprooting their lives had not been easy. They sold off their cattle to pay for a lawyer to pursue their case, but Sumitra's assailant was acquitted due to lack of evidence. According to data collected by the Assam government, 77 people were killed, and 60 injured, in 93 cases of witch-hunting between 2010 and 2015.

In 2015, following years of campaigning by activists such as Birubala Rabha, who braved a social boycott to raise awareness about witch-hunting and support survivors, the Assam legislature made accusations of witchcraft a cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable offence, to be punished by up to seven years in prison. However, the perpetrators in almost all the cases I studied had been acquitted, and most of them had been on the run ever since. Although my research was restricted to the personal fallout of accusations of witchcraft, it was difficult to ignore the chronic failure of the police to arrest and prosecute the accusers, as well as to protect the accused families from further repercussions.

The emotional toll of being branded a witch is considerable, especially in a country where access to mental healthcare is restricted to the privileged. Many of the survivors I interviewed were unwilling, or unable, to recount the trauma they had experienced. But they appeared to me as silent revolutionaries, as they attempted to rebuild their life and put the accusations behind them.

Sumitra, for instance, started working at a tea plantation within a month of being attacked and leaving Amlaiguri. She was not comfortable sharing her story or being photographed, especially once she saw the

crowd that had gathered at her house on my arrival. (I had to return at a more opportunit moment.) Like Sumitra, Sonamoni preferred to let her husband recount her story. She would, however, look at me and smile from time to time. "I know I never did any wrong to anyone, and I am not afraid of anyone either," she told me. "They can call me whatever they want. All I regret is the pain that my family had to go through because of this."

Some of the women went beyond quiet defiance. Lakhyamati not only resumed working as a cook soon after returning to Jangalgaon, but was eventually elected general secretary of the cooks' association at the village school.

She told me that she gathered signatures from everybody in the village, so that nobody would be able to have her removed from her job. She had also been working tirelessly as part of the village's self-help groups. "I know that I am empowered, and that is how I have always been," she said, when I asked her about working with those who had forced her to leave the village on pain of death. "They are insecure and scared." Lakhyamati added that, although it took a lot of time, the women of the village had begun expressing regret at remaining silent as their husbands harassed her family. "If I have gained the women's trust," she told me with a smile, "I must be doing something right."

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DESIRE AND GENDER IN TWO NOVELS ABOUT HEREDITARY DANCERS

Sharanya Manivannan

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For centuries, Thanjavur, in Tamil Nadu, was a major centre of medieval and colonial artistic production. Among its artists was a matrilineal community of erudite women dedicated to temples, who received political and other powerful forms of patronage. Prevalently known as “devadasis,” they were renowned for creative talents, including dance, notably the form sometimes known as *sadir-attam*, which became widely known later as *Bharatanatyam*.

“Devadasi” is a historical, and loaded, word. “‘Devadasi’ is not a term that South Indian hereditary artists were familiar with—it is a term the British and the newly educated class of Indians used to gloss over women who did not conform to patriarchal norms,” the Chennai-based dancer Nrithya Pillai told me over an e-mail. “The term today is used only for women from Dalit communities such as Basavi, Jogati and Mathamma and Dalit cults such as Yellama, Jogini and Mathamma. Their marginalization and their culture is extremely different from that of women from courtesan communities like mine.” Since the devadasis from courtesan traditions were not Dalits, to conflate their realities with those of Dalit women “is epistemologically violent in itself,” Pillai added.



She advised, instead, using the phrase “women from hereditary dance communities’ ” when speaking about women from courtesan communities today. It is useful to keep this in mind when approaching any work on the historical devadasis. The existence of contemporary hereditary dance communities is sometimes unknown, as the usurping of their identities and art forms into the Brahmanical

establishment was, and remains, extensive. This erasure began with a reform movement in the first half of the twentieth century, influenced by British and Brahmin moral sensibilities, which culminated in the banning of devadasi and similar systems throughout the country—notably in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies. The movement’s self-appointed saviours came in all stripes, from outraged women to outright misogynists and, complexly, those who worked in social justice.

The scholar Daves Soneji writes in *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory and Modernity in South India*: “Legal interventions in the Madras Presidency were engineered by Muthulakshmi Reddy, daughter of a Brahmin father and a mother from a devadasi community in Pudukottai. Reddy was also the first female doctor in the Madras Presidency, and she was responsible for implementing a series of reforms related to women’s physical and social health. The explicit purpose of her activities was to criminalize the ‘dedication’ of girls [poukkautal]. For reformers, the ritual of poukkautal enabled prostitution and the abuse of women that resulted from relationships unsanctioned by marriage. ... The devadasi abolition movement stood at the intersection of the Congress party and anti-Brahmin politics in Madras, and was strongly supported by both Gandhi and E.V. Ramasami Naicker.”

The crucial fulcrum in the Brahmin appropriation of the dance form, executed even as the agency of the dancers themselves was being erased, was Rukmini Devi Arundale. Arundale is widely believed to have stripped the dance of its sensual nature, to establish the religious, internationally famous, form known as Bharatanatyam.

Gitanjali Kolanad’s new novel, *Girl Made of Gold*, published this year, is poised at the cusp of when the hereditary dance community fell into disrespectability, leading to the laws banning their culture that came into effect with Independence. The novel takes place in the 1920s, when the system was beginning to face its first rumblings of change. A teenaged dancer named Kanaka disappears suddenly, amid contentious demands on the choices, or concessions, she must make with her life. Then, an exquisite golden statue of a girl appears in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple that her family’s women perform rituals in. Some are pleased to accept this as a miraculous intervention, an exchange that proves Kanaka’s safety or even her merging into divinity. Others, including the police, are less convinced. Another novel, published two years ago,

that also chronicles the era when the devadasi-abolition movement came into effect, tracing both its preamble as well as the devastation that followed—and persists decades later—is Srividya Natarajan's *The Undoing Dance*. *Girl Made of Gold* carries a few of its echoes, and even certain similarities. It is tempting to read the two novels as in *simpatico*, even though their spirits are vastly different.

Natarajan and Kolanad are both Canada-based dancers who were trained in India. Kolanad trained at Chennai's Kalakshetra, the foundation established by Rukmini Devi Arundale, while Natarajan trained under, among others, KP Kittappa Pillai and T Brinda, who were from hereditary performance backgrounds. Their approaches to the originators, artists and safekeepers of their dance form differ considerably. This divergence reflects modern perceptions of historical devadasis and contemporary hereditary dancers. Kolanad's novel accepts the decline of their era, assigning them bleakly to history, despite its final, uplifting twist. Natarajan's book asserts their lives and legacies in ways that demand better of all who have descended from the vicious erasures of the abolition and appropriation movements, regardless of how they trace their involvement.

Kolanad's first work of fiction was an evocative collection of short stories, *Sleeping With Movie Stars*. Those stories took place mostly around the coastal-Madras neighbourhoods where Kalakshetra still stands, and depicted the milieu and its cast of artistic characters vividly. The character in *Girl Made of Gold* whose voice comes closest to that timbre, a mix of philosophy and poetry, is the one known only as "the priest." The book is told from myriad perspectives, often in the third person but occasionally, and sometimes for very minor characters, in the soliloquy form. The author suggests through the priest's voice that the arbitrary nature of these narrative choices is deliberate. As the novel's most compelling narrator, he says, "There are many ways to tell a story," citing examples such as the "river's flow", "lion's glance", "frog's hop" and "flower garland." He suggests that there are even more, recounting how he once saw a woman enter a river all the way up to her hips to fill a pot of water, and how he contemplated the way she would decant its contents into some pilgrim's hands some time later, without the pilgrim ever knowing the lengths she went to obtain it. Such asides gild the storyline. The mystery about Kanaka's disappearance develops very slowly, acquires a sudden twist and takes on a thrilling urgency in the latter third of the book.

In a novel full of sordid choices and actions undertaken by multiple characters, it is the priest's repentance that sets him apart. Having transcended carnal desire because of the ravages of disease, his concerns drift between the aesthetic values of temple architecture and the inexplicable nature of the universe—as well as his obligation to rectify what he can. The priest, whose caste and gender, and what these enable him to do, could easily have been painted as the villain in a more didactic text, but is rendered in a nuanced and ultimately redemptive way. In his way of detailing the world, and in his acceptance of life's capriciousness, the murders, rapes and transgressions in *Girl Made of Gold* are somehow rendered less lurid. This is a thriller with something incongruous at its core, and it is this incongruity that is its most interesting element.

However, in too many ways, *Girl Made of Gold* is a book about male sexual desire and libido. There is the patron Vallabendran, thinking of how his wife Devayani never had any of the talents of the young Nagaveni, who performed elaborate seduction techniques using a betel leaf. He conjures up this memory just a few minutes before an erection springs up while receiving a massage from Janardana, a queer person who loves to dress in the finery of his aunts and grandmother. "What appetites you still have," Janardana tells him. "You are a man among men." There are other boasts—the British-educated Indra recalls how an English friend's mother insulted him at the dining table but still knelt by his bedside later that night. A distinction is always drawn between the women who satisfy men sexually and those who do not seem able to. Tellingly, there is an inability to see parallels between the lawful wives who pour their sexual frustration into religious devotion—"So she's embraced god as if he were her lover. She dreams of the god, sings songs to the god, but the god is made of stone and doesn't respond."—and the devadasi who has been dedicated to the temple, and with it to the social freedom, literacy and artistic education that is allowed to her.

The novel's women have no sensuality or sexuality that is not merely to please men. Even Kanaka's brave explorations with her lover, Indra, are described from his viewpoint. He claims he does not want a marriage like his parents, bereft of lust, yet when she tells him that she does not believe in the institution, he shames her. The verses that she is able to recite by heart, thanks to her upbringing, to describe not only her stance against marriage but also her feelings for him, are shot down by this

blatant retort: “Don’t tell me this is what you really want, to lie with one man and then another?”

By contrast, Natarajan’s rendering of *The Undoing Dance*’s Kalyani, as a girl of the same age and background as Kanaka who also finds herself in an illicit relationship, is far more delicately etched. It is Kalyani’s inner monologue we are privy to, not her lover’s approximation of what it might be, strongly tinted by his own perspectives. Kalyani compares her fantasies—a mingling of lust, inexperience and ornate ambient detail—to the pleasant but surprising realities of their coupling. These all come together on a walk she takes with her lover, when he tugs at a bunch of banana flowers and tells her she can drink from them. “I opened the pink-and-purple fleshy envelopes of the inflorescence, found the flowers, picked one and sucked from it, the nectar sweet as it touched my tongue. We walked on, touching the walls; the buildings, the royal stables, once full of horses and elephants, crumbled like soft biscuits. Other lovers had been here over the years, had scratched their names with shale on the patches of plaster, and had vanished with time.”

So much is evoked in these lines, as Kalyani absorbs the novelties she is encountering. Natarajan allows us to experience the inner worlds of the novel’s women, even as their changing external world weighs down on them.

Where *The Undoing Dance*’s women are suffused with tenderness and nuance, the women in *Girl Made of Gold* are rendered, by and large, in very sharp angles. They are manipulative and shorn of joy, and have very little affection or solidarity for each other. Take how Ratna, Nagaveni’s daughter, responds to Janardana, when the latter enquires about how Vallabendran could have bedded both her mother and her. Ratna responds cynically, “Don’t the poems say that the man who’s paying can choose: the experience and skillful love-making of the mother, the beauty and freshness of the daughter, or the untasted sweetness of the granddaughter?”

Perhaps such verses do exist. Yet, to contrast this sentiment with not only the classical Telugu padams of Ksetrayya and other poets, which are rife with jealousies and longings, but also with the words of the iconic polymath Muddupalani of the eighteenth century Thanjavur court herself, leaves Ratna’s characterisation a little pallid. In *When God is a Customer*:

Telugu Courtesan Songs by Ksetrayya and Others, translated by AK Ramanujan, Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, following the standard classical metonymy of the beloved reconfigured as deity, a courtesan asks,

“Why tell lies, Muvva Gopala,
when clearly she’s the one you crave
while all the time you’re making love
to me?”

Similarly, in Sandhya Mulchandani’s translation of Radhika Santawanam, Muddupalani’s mythological Radha laments,

“Has she forgotten that she learnt
To sing like the nightingale from me?
Has she forgotten she learnt to write poetry from me?
Has she forgotten she learnt to play musical instruments from me?
Has she forgotten she even learnt to make love from me?”

In this work, the poet presumably drew inspiration from the envy she felt toward her grandmother, Tanjanayaki, who still held sway over her beloved Raja Pratapsimha’s affections. Muddupalani reversed her own pain by writing, instead, about Radha’s heartbreak that her protégée had stolen her place in Krishna’s world. The women in *Girl Made of Gold* do not have such emotional palettes. We see their actions, and must only infer what complicated sensitivities drove them.

It is arguable that an author has no moral imperative to present characters or storylines that pass tests of sociopolitical rigour, and fiction that is accurate to life—historical fiction in particular—must necessarily fail such tests on certain counts. Kolanad does draw attention to casteism and caste disparity in myriad ways, such as when the Brahmin boy Subbu, having gotten into fisticuffs with some bullies, goes home to bathe before proceeding to Nagaveni’s house to learn more about Kanaka’s disappearance, or in lines such as “It was the hypocrisy practiced by all men of good caste, that while they raised the legs of untouchable girls onto their shoulders, they wouldn’t take food from their hands.”

This is not met with similar attention to gender disparity. The sentence illustrating caste hypocrisy is followed by this glib acknowledgement: “Yet both sides knew, didn’t they, that in the privacy of their desire, they’d been equals.” The internalised misogyny of most of the women in *Girl Made*

of Gold is not tempered with clear delineations about the circumstances that shaped them. The men's inner worlds are highly detailed. As for the women, we are left reconstructing their inner worlds from the ways that men perceive them.

As acerbic as it is tender, *The Undoing Dance* is a powerful novel that offers a meaningful contrast to *Girl Made of Gold* while providing a highly relevant and modern contextualisation for what happened to the women known as devadasis, and to the dance form they were best known for. The book takes place over the latter half of the twentieth century, following the vicissitudes of a lineage of disenfranchised dancers from Kalyanikkarai, in Thanjavur district. Rajayi, among the last to perform in temples with the sanction of state and society, makes efforts to secure a better lot in life for her daughter Kalyani, sending her first to a convent school and then into a marriage with an uppercaste impresario. Hema, Kalyani's stepdaughter, rounds out the trifecta of voices in this novel. (In Natarajan's book too is another Kanaka, who "danced like thatch on fire," although she is an ancestor, not a protagonist.)

Rajayi and Kalyani ultimately resist the notion that they dance at the end of a lineage, beautifully showing how even that which is erased at large can thrive tenaciously in surprising ways. They resist rendering their lives as tragedy. In one section, Kalyani recalls the Brahmin girls who bring their own water to the homes of nattuvanars such as Samu Vathiyar, in order to avoid the pollution of drinking from his supply. They steal his hereditary art forms and pay him for the theft; it is they who become the doyennes of the world of dance later on, once the refurbishment of the dance form was complete. Natarajan lays the transaction bare over the course of her novel. It was the mothers of those students, after all, who were the banner-carrying women clad in khaddar saris at the forefront of public protests that linked and conflated the end of the devadasi culture with the end of colonial rule, while Kalyani and her foremothers watched, fearing what was to come: "And we—we did not belong in the world they knew they were making."

The novel's pivotal plot point is when the mendacious, internationally acclaimed dancer Padmasini decides to visit Rajayi in Kalyanikkarai on the pretext of making a film about the latter's own renown and heritage. The elderly Rajayi makes her living by selling flowers outside the temples she once held court in, and some of the novel's most scathing sequences

revolve around Padmasini's exploitations of her. The women whose livelihoods were taken from them, the performers and teachers whose art forms were stolen, and the esoteric ways of worship that were desecrated, ironically, through their sanitisation, are rendered a fitting homage in Natarajan's magnificent work. Equally, its relevance to the contemporary world of dance cannot be underestimated. Padmasini is not a caricature; in her character are captured myriad accuracies about the bigotries and narcissisms of the classical south Indian art sphere still prevalent today, and canonised as upper-caste culture.

The unfortunate bevy of unflattering tropes that the women in *Girl Made of Gold* illustrate—"A courtesan is like a balance, she tilts to the side that has more gold," a nattuvanar, a musician from a hereditary community, observes—are depicted by Natarajan with complexity and intricacy, and with a fuller political consciousness. In Kolanad's novel, the pain and disenfranchisement experienced by dancers from hereditary communities from the 1920s onwards—a direct result of British morality and Brahmin appropriation—is absorbed into a stoic narrative about the vagaries of human life. *The Undoing Dance*, meanwhile, brims with pathos.

"Unfortunately, the stigma of belonging to criminalised (through reform) communities persists, in fact stronger than before reform, and one can see how the burdens of stigma still survive in different ways," Pillai told me. "This is why it has taken this much time to hear articulate voices speaking of the politics of Devadasi reform from within the community. There have been no reparative measures. Reform has definitely purged hereditary women and their identities from public spaces. The issue with representing hereditary women as tragic figures and propagating false one-sided narratives is that it affects women and artists from these communities today, inflicting pain and a certain kind of shame on us—they attempt to paralyse voices like mine."



Sharanya Manivannan writes and illustrates fiction, non-fiction, poetry and children's literature. Among her seven books are, *The High Priestess Never Marries*, a short story collection that received a 2017 *Laadli* Award.

कैसे इन पीरियड्स ने मुझे, एक लड़के को, पितृसत्तात्मक बना दिया

प्रशांत प्रत्यूष

8 अप्रैल 2020, विमेंसवेब.इन

मेरे पास पीरियड्स से जुड़ा वो अनुभव है, जिसने पहली बार मुझे यह बताया कि मैं समाज के उस वर्ग का हिस्सा हूँ जिसे पुरुष वर्ग कहा जाता है और वह सब से बेहतर है। मेरे पास पीरियड्स से जुड़ा वो अनुभव है, जिसने पहली बार मुझे यह बताया कि मैं समाज के उस वर्ग का हिस्सा हूँ जिसे पुरुष वर्ग कहा जाता है और वह सब से बेहतर है। ज़ाहिर सी बात है कि एक लड़का होने के नाते मेरे पास पीरियड्स से जुड़े वह अनुभव नहीं होंगे जो एक लड़की के पहले पीरियड्स से होते होंगे।

मेरे पास नारी शरीर से जुड़े, उस दौर के मानसिक या सामाजिक अनुभव तो नहीं हैं। मेरे पास वह अनुभव ज़रूर है जिसने पहली बार मुझे यह बताया कि मैं समाज के उस वर्ग का हिस्सा हूँ जिसे वर्गीय विभाजन के आधार पर पुरुष वर्ग कहा जाता है और वह सबों से बेहतर है। दूसरे शब्दों में, पीरियड्स से जुड़े अनुभवों ने मुझे पितृसत्तात्मक बनाया।

जब मेरे साथ की लड़कियों के पीरियड्स शुरू हुए

इस अनुभव से मेरे पहला तारुफ तब हुआ, जब मेरे बचपन की एक महिला मित्र का पीरियड शुरू हुआ। पहले मैं बचपन के दोस्तों के सर्किल में अकेला पड़ गया। पहली मित्र ने मेरे साथ खेलना बंद कर दिया और दूसरी ने अपने घर वालों के कहने पर मुझसे दूरी बनानी शुरू कर दी। मेरा बाल मन अचानक से इस बदलाव का कारण समझ नहीं पाया कि आखिर क्या हुआ न ही किसी ने मुझे समझाया। मैं पहले अपने घर में कैद हुआ बाल पत्तिकाएं और इन्डोर गेम्स से मेरा परिचय हुआ जैसे लूडो, शतरंज, व्यापारी और क्वीज़ जैसे खेल। पीरियड्स ही इन सबों का मूल कारण है, यह किसी ने मुझे नहीं समझाया।

समझ नहीं पाया कि आखिर क्या हुआ, न ही किसी ने मुझे समझाया

मैं समझ ही नहीं पा रहा था कि मैं अब तक खेले जाने वाले खेलों से अचानक वंचित क्यों कर दिया गया? कित-कित और डेगा-पानी जैसे खेलों से ही नहीं, मेरे महिला साथियों से भी

मुझे क्यों वंचित कर दिया गया? मैं मन ही मन में अपने बचपन के महिला साथियों को लेकर कुढ़ता रहा।

अब उन लड़कियों के साथ तो खेला ही नहीं जा सकता था

जब मौजूद इंडोर गेम्स में सुस्त और बोझिल होने लगा और घर से चुरा-छुपाकर मैं दूसरे बच्चों के साथ कंचे खेलने या पंतंग लूटने या गुल्ली डंडा खेलने के लिए भागने लगा। तब इससे मुझे बचाने के लिए भाई साहब की साईकिल थमा दी गई, जिसका जोश कुछ ही दिनों में फीका पड़ गया और मैं पुनः कंचे, पंतंग और गुल्ली डंडा के पीछे भागने लगा। तब मेरी संगत बिगड़ जाने के डर से मुझे उन खेलों से मुझसे बड़े भाई साहबों से परिचय कराया जो घरों के छतों या गली-मोहल्ले में नहीं खेला जा सकता था और लड़कियों के साथ तो खैर खेला ही नहीं जा सकता था।

मुझे एहसास कराया गया कि लड़कों और लड़कियों के खेल अलग होते हैं

मुझे मैदान जाने की छूट मिली जहां मैं क्रिकेट, फुटबाल, हांकी, कबड्डी और बास्केट बाल जैसे गेम्स खेल सकता था। पहली बार मुझे यह एहसास कराया गया कि लड़कों के लिए ये वाले खेल होते हैं और लड़कियों के खो-खो, कित-कित जैसे खेल होते हैं। कच्चे खेलना, पंतंग लूटना या गुल्ली-डंडा जैसे खेल कमतर बच्चों के खेल हैं।

महिला साथियों से अलग होता चला गया और खुद को श्रेष्ठ समझने लगा

मैं अपने बचपन के महिला साथियों से अलग होता चला गया और खुद को पुरुष समझने लगा। मेरे सामाजिक परिवेश ने मुझे श्रेष्ठ होने का एहसास करा दिया, वह भी इस कदर कि मैं अपने बचपन के महिला साथियों से बात करना और टोकना तो दूर उनके जिद्द करने पर उनके साथ हिंसक होने लगा, उन पर हाथ छोड़ देता, उनकी चोटी पकड़कर खींच देता। यह सब कुछ मेरे साथ चलता रहा पर किसी ने मुझे पीरियड्स के बारे में नहीं समझाया।

ये कुवारी भोज क्या होता है?

पीरियड्स के बारे में मुझे पहली जानकारी उस सांस्कृत आयोजन से हुई जो भारत के हर हिस्से में अलग-अलग तरीके से मनाया जाता है, कुमारी कन्याओं की पूजा और भोज खिलाने का लिए जिसे कुवारी भोज कहा जाता है के लिए मुझे भी जब जाने को कहा गया। मेरा बाल मन अब तक शादी-विवाह, जन्मदिन, गृहप्रवेश और मृत्यु भोज ही जानता था कुवारी भोज क्या होता है? जब यह सवाल मैंने पूछा तो कोई जवाब नहीं मिला।

इस भोज मैं जब अपने बचपन के महिला साथियों के घर गया और उनसे सवाल किया तुम लोगों ने मेरे साथ खेलना क्यों छोड़ दिया? तब जवाब मिला – हम लोग अब बड़े हो गए, अब साथ में नहीं खेल सकते हैं। उन दोनों ने मुझ पर तोहमत ज़रूर लगाई कि मैं बहुत बदल गया हूँ तो मैंने कहा, “मैं भी बड़ा हो गया हूँ न।”

पीरियड्स के दौरान बन रहे सामाजिक परिवेश का समाजीकरण

पीरियड्स का प्रारंभ केवल लड़कियों के जीवन में नाटकीय परिवर्तन नहीं लाता है, उसका असर लड़कों पर भी पड़ता है। इसकी व्याख्या कम देखने को मिलती है, पीरियड्स के दौरान बन रहे सामाजिक परिवेश का समाजीकरण ही लड़कों के अंदर पितृसत्ता का बीज गाड़ देता है जो धीरे-धीरे विशाल हो जाता है, जो लड़कियों को दोगुना दर्जे का वस्तु मानने लगता है।

समाज पीरियड्स पर ज़्यादा बात नहीं करता

इसकी चर्चा मैंने उस वक्त की जब मैं नौवी क्लास का छात्र हुआ और क्लास में प्रजनन का चैप्टर पढ़ाया गया। मैंने पीरियड्स के बारे में बारिक से बारिक बातों को बताना शुरू किया उस वक्त मैंने इन अनुभवों पर चर्चा की। मैंने बताया कि पीरियड्स को लेकर सामाजिक मान्यताएं और मिथक समाज में इस कदर हावी हैं कि वह इस पर बात करना जरूरी नहीं समझते हैं। जिसके कारण कई तरह के वर्गीय विभाजन ही नहीं कई तरह की समस्याएं भी खड़ी हो जाती हैं। इस विभाजन और समस्याओं का असर आगे चलकर बहुत अधिक गहरा होता है यह मानवीय सामाजिक व्यवहार में आचार-व्यवहार को भी प्रभावित करता है।

मैं जेडर स्टडी के रिसर्चर के तौर पर इन बातों के बारे में सोचता हूँ

आज जब मैं जेडर स्टडी के रिसर्चर के तौर पर इन बातों के बारे में सोचता हूँ तो यह विश्वास पक्का हो जाता है कि लड़कियों के पीरियड्स के दौरान अगर सामाजिक परिवेश बच्चों का उचित समाजीकरण करें तो पितृसत्ता के उस बीज का जड़ से खत्म किया जा सकता है। जिसका पाठ समाज बच्चों को खासकर लड़कों को देता है।

अगर मेरे बालपन में ही मुझे इन विसंगितियों के बारे में कोई समझाता या समझाने का प्रयास भर करता है तो मेरे अंदर पुरुष दंभ के उस चरित्र का निर्माण कभी नहीं होता जिसको मैं कालेज के दिनों तक बेहतर साहित्य के संपर्क में आने से पहले बेवज़ह ढो रहा था।



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महिलाओं के प्रति इस मानसिकता को क्या कहिएगा ?

जाहिद खान

8 मार्च 2021, देशबंधु

8 मार्च, पूरी दुनिया में अंतरराष्ट्रीय महिला दिवस के तौर पर मनाया जाता है। इस दिन तमाम सरकारी और गैर सरकारी कार्यक्रमों में महिलाओं के विकास, समाज में लैंगिक भेदभाव के खात्मे पर बड़ी-बड़ी बातें की जाती हैं। लेकिन समाज में महिलाओं का कितना विकास हुआ, उन्हें पुरुषों के संग कितनी बराबरी मिली, लैंगिक समानता का स्तर क्या है, महिलाओं को अपनी शारीरिक संरचना के आधार पर कितना भेदभाव झेलना पड़ता है, महिलाओं के प्रति पुरुष तो पुरुष, खुद महिलाओं की उनके प्रति क्या मानसिकता है ? यह सारी बातें, हाल ही में पेश आए दो वाक्यों से जानी जा सकती है। पहला वाक्या, गुजरात के भुज स्थित एक गर्ल्स हॉस्टल का है, जहां 68 छात्राओं को माहवारी होने का सबूत देने के लिए महिला टीचरों के सामने अपने कपड़े उतारने पड़े। उनके साथ जिन्होंने यह अमानवीय व्यवहार किया, वह खुद भी महिलाएं थीं, बावजूद इसके इस अमानवीय कृत्य करने में उन्हें कोई शर्म महसूस नहीं हुई। न उन्हें यह हिचक लगी कि छात्राओं के साथ वे जो कुछ कर रही हैं, वह गलत है। आधुनिक होते समाज में महिलाओं की माहवारी को लेकर आज भी इस हॉस्टल ने सामंतवादी नियम बना रखे हैं। नियम के मुताबिक जिस लड़की को माहवारी होगी, वह इस दौरान हॉस्टल में नहीं रहेगी। उसके लिए हॉस्टल के बेसमेंट में रहने की जगह बनी है। साथ ही वह लोगों से घुलेगी-मिलेगी नहीं। न ही रसोई और पूजा स्थल में प्रवेश करेगी। जैसे किसी महिला को माहवारी आना, एक अपराध हो।

मीडिया रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक इस छात्रावास में लड़कियों को अपने पीरियड्स की तारीखों के एंट्री एक रजिस्टर में करनी होती है। जब कुछ दिनों तक लड़कियों ने इस रजिस्टर में एंट्री नहीं की, तो हॉस्टल प्रशासन ने शिकायत की कि लड़कियां पीरियड्स के दौरान रसोई, मंदिर, मेस आदि में जा रही हैं और बाकी लड़कियों से घुल-मिल रही हैं। इस बात को जांचने के लिए लड़कियों से सवाल-जवाब हुए और जिन्होंने पीरियड्स होने की बात स्वीकार नहीं कि उनसे जबरन अंडरगार्मेंट्स उतारकर साबित करने को कहा गया कि वे पीरियड्स से नहीं गुजर रही हैं। प्रिंसिपल के अलावा कॉलेज के अन्य स्टाफ ने मिलकर छात्राओं के साथ अपमानजनक व्यवहार किया। जब लड़कियों ने इस अमानवीय और अपमानजनक बर्ताव का विरोध किया, तो हॉस्टल की वॉर्डन ने उनसे कहा कि वह चाहे तो उनके खिलाफ अदालत जा सकती हैं। लेकिन उन्हें यह कदम उठाने से पहले स्कूल हॉस्टल छोड़ना होगा और डिक्लरेशन फॉर्म पर

साइन करना होगा। जिसमें लिखा हुआ था कि 'उनके साथ कुछ गलत नहीं हुआ है।' यह मामला जब मीडिया में आया, तो हंगामा मच गया। लोगों ने इस घटना में शामिल कर्मचारियों, वार्डन और प्रधान अध्यापक के खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई की मांग की। गुजरात महिला आयोग और राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग ने घटना का संज्ञान लेकर, इस पूरे मामले की जांच के लिए एक समिति गठित कर दी। मीडिया और तमाम सामाजिक संगठनों के दबाव में प्रशासन को आखिरकार कॉलेज की प्रिंसिपल, वार्डन और चार अन्य लोगों के खिलाफ मामला दर्ज करना पड़ा। लड़कियों के साथ जो कुछ हुआ, उसे किसी भी लिहाज से सही नहीं ठहराया जा सकता। एक तरफ महिलाओं के मान-सम्मान की बात होती है, तो दूसरी और उनके साथ इस तरह के कृत्य पेश आते हैं, जो उनकी गरिमा के खिलाफ हैं।

महिलाओं के प्रति अपमानजनक और अमानवीय बर्ताव का दूसरा वाक्या भी गुजरात का ही है। जहां राज्य की एक ट्रायल कोर्ट ने बलात्कार मामले में पीड़ित महिला का 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट' कराकर रेप के आरोपी को बरी कर दिया था। इस मामले में 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट' के माध्यम से ट्रायल कोर्ट इस निष्कर्ष पर पहुंची थी कि पीड़िता की उम्र 16 साल से ज्यादा है और शारीरिक संबंध में पीड़िता की सहमति थी। बहरहाल जब यह मामला गुजरात हाईकोर्ट पहुंचा, तो फैसला पीड़िता के पक्ष में हुआ। हाई कोर्ट ने ट्रायल कोर्ट का फैसला पलटते हुए कहा, बलात्कार के मामले में पीड़िता के कौमार्य/सहमति के निर्धारण के लिए किया जाने वाला 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट' परीक्षण के सबसे अवैज्ञानिक तरीकों में से एक है और इसका कोई फॉरेंसिक महत्व नहीं है। यौन उत्पीड़न से पहले शारीरिक संबंध में पीड़िता के शामिल होने का इस बात से कोई लेना-देना नहीं है कि उसने यौन उत्पीड़न के मामले में सहमति दी थी या नहीं। अदालत यही नहीं रुक गई, बल्कि उसने इस मामले में और भी सख्त टिप्पणी करते हुए कहा, ट्रायल कोर्ट के साथ-साथ चिकित्सा जगत को याद दिलाया जाए कि 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट' असंवैधानिक है। क्योंकि यह बलात्कार पीड़िता के निजता और गरिमा के अधिकार का उल्लंघन करता है। 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट' भारतीय साक्ष्य अधिनियम की धारा 146 के प्रत्यक्ष विरोध में है, जिसका कहना है कि 'रेप या रेप की कोशिश के मामले के पीड़िता के चरित्र पर सवाल उठाने की अनुमति नहीं होगी।' इसके साथ ही हाई कोर्ट ने ट्रायल कोर्ट की 25 साल पुरानी गलती को सुधार दिया और आरोपी को बलात्कार का दोषी ठहराया।

बलात्कार सभ्य समाज के दामन पर एक ऐसा दाग है, जिसका सबसे ज्यादा दर्द पीड़िता को भोगना पड़ता है। बलात्कार के बाद भी इंसाफ के लिए उसे ऐसे-ऐसे इन्तिहानों से गुजरना पड़ता है कि कमजोर इच्छाशक्ति की महिलाएं तो अपनी लड़ाई अधूरी ही छोड़ देती हैं। इस मामले को ही यदि देखें, तो 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट', भारतीय साक्ष्य अधिनियम की धारा 146

के सीधे-सीधे खिलाफ में है। देश की सर्वोच्च अदालत ने भी दिसंबर, 2019 में अपने एक महत्वपूर्ण फैसले में 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट' के उपयोग को बंद करने को कहा था। बावजूद इसके कई बार निचली अदालतें 'टू-फिंगर टेस्ट' जैसी अमानवीय और अपमानजनक प्रक्रिया को गवाही का हिस्सा मान लेती हैं।

जबकि यह सारी प्रक्रिया असंवैधानिक और औरत की गरिमा के खिलाफ है। यही नहीं महिलाओं में माहवारी का आना प्राकृतिक है और इस प्रक्रिया में ऐसा कुछ भी नहीं, जो उनके साथ भेदभाव किया जाए। उन्हें परिवार के बाकी सदस्यों से अलग रखना, रसोई और धार्मिक कार्यकलापों में उनका निषेध, पुरुषवादी मानसिकता से इतर कुछ नहीं। जो महिलाओं को पुरुषों से कमतर और माहवारी आने के आधार पर ही उन्हें अछूत मान लेती है। वे 'अपवित्र' हो जाती हैं। माहवारी के उन कठिन दिनों में जब महिलाओं को शारीरिक आराम और मानसिक सहारे की जरूरत होती है, कई परिवारों में आज भी उनके साथ भेदभाव किया जाता है। उन्हें गलत नजर से देखा जाता है। मानो उन्होंने कोई अपराध कर दिया हो। परिवार तो परिवार जब इस तरह की अपमानजनक प्रवृत्तियां, उन शैक्षणिक संस्थानों में भी पहुंच जाए, जिनका काम महिला-पुरुष बराबरी का पाठ पढ़ाना, महिलाओं को अपने शरीर के प्रति सम्मान जगाना और उन्हें अपने अधिकारों के प्रति जागृत करना है, तो इससे ज्यादा विडम्बनापूर्ण स्थिति क्या होगी ? लैंगिक समानता का उच्च स्तर तभी छुआ जा सकता है, जब समाज में महिलाओं के साथ लिंग के आधार पर होने वाले भेदभाव को पूरी तरह से खतम किया जाएगा। महिलाओं की शारीरिक संरचना और माहवारी जैसी प्राकृतिक प्रक्रियाएं सम्मान की नजर से देखी जाएंगी।



Jahid Khan is a renowned freelance writer who has been working in this field for the past 20 years. He is popularly known for his progressive writings related to human issues and has penned more than 1000 articles and reviews so far.

WHY MARRIAGES FAIL

Rudra Prassanna Rath

9 December 2020, Prameya

Marriage season kicks off soon after the festive season in Odisha and other parts of India. Thousands of marriages will happen in every corner of the state in the coming few months. The typical marriage season lasts for 3-4 months. However, the industry that survives on the marriage business has been drastically hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, restrictions have been lifted in many parts of the state, which will help the marriage industry pick up. Prospective brides and grooms would have already paid vendors and informed their relatives as everyone waits for auspicious times and wedding bells.

However, some have to deal with broken engagements. Many meetings for marriage begin in the drawing-room of the prospective bride's home. However, they don't move beyond negotiations when the colour of one's skin and the inability to pay a heavy dowry become a bottleneck. The prospective bride is demoralised with every rejection yet carries on the facade of meeting other future grooms with garish make-up as she serves them tea.

As per Indian customs, interviewing a girl before marriage remains a harrowing experience for the bride. The process of interviewing a girl usually goes up to several rounds. First the mediator, then the family members of the proposed groom, then the groom himself. Sometimes even the groom's neighbours visit the prospective bride's home two to three times before the marriage is finalised. As these visits get prolonged, the bride to be and her family are indebted to entertain the guests with a fancy spread of food. Sometimes even after such lavish arrangements, the marriage is not fixed on flimsy grounds, beyond any reasonable comprehension. Once the marriage negotiations fall apart, everybody goes their way. However, it's difficult for the woman to overcome the stigma of rejection and carry on leading her normal life. She is made to feel answerable to her family, friends and relatives. This fear of rejection is grappling and sometimes brings in an inferiority complex. Some girls fear stepping out and are made to feel like it's the end of the road. The girl's parents often resort to numerology, palmistry etc., to find answers hoping to know of the auspicious time their child will get married, if at all.

On the other hand, the boy's family often takes pride in the number of women they have rejected. Many marriages are known to have been frequently called off so late, incurring heavy losses to the bride's families, who mainly bear the brunt of the expenditure of the whole wedding. Unfortunately, the Indian legal system has no such provision to compensate the bride's side for the expenses incurred in last-minute cancellations. Though the Supreme Court of India has given a verdict to pay a bride's family's part of the expenditure, it is yet not fruitful. In many cases, once a wedding is cancelled, the bride's family is mentally low and cannot fight out the long term battle to recoup the expenditure.

A probable solution lies in sending the women to see a therapist. Unfortunately, most of the available therapists are not trained enough to counsel women going through the trauma of rejection. Often girls and their family members cannot even accept and acknowledge that a cancelled marriage has exerted pressure requiring psychosocial care. There have been a few instances where, unable to deal with the rejection, girls have committed suicide.

What is the way out to handle this situation? First and foremost, we must create awareness and build a regular support system for the family involved. This support creates some mental peace and gives the family some stability. Further educating our women and increasing their livelihood also gives them the strength to deal with situations. The groom's side should also be sensitised to create awareness. They should be sensitised enough to themselves in a woman's shoes. Can they?

(Translated from Odia to English)



Rudra Prasanna Rath is a freelance columnist and a development practitioner for the last 15 years. He has been writing on gender related issues in different mediums and has won a number of awards and recognitions.

WEDDING SEASON BRINGS MORE WOMEN TO HOSPITAL WITH INJURIES FROM RAPE

Bijaya Biswal

24 December 2020, thecitizen.in

Is non-consensual sex a heinous crime or sacred duty?

It was a case which could easily have been interpreted as rape, had the woman not been married.

When Subhashree is asked her age, she takes a moment to think before saying in an inconspicuous voice, "Must be fifteen or sixteen." She isn't sure when she had her last period, and fumbles before giving the resident doctor another approximate answer.

"It's normal for patients who have survived trauma to struggle with recent memory," the professor assures the young resident upon overhearing the conversation.

Subhashree arrived at the hospital with a complaint of abdominal pain and vaginal bleeding after sexual intercourse on her wedding night. She looks intimidated and intensely in pain. An examination reveals massive vaginal tears, suggesting... violent, traumatic sex? The insertion of objects?

The doctors say such patients are seen frequently in the wedding season. On other days, there are 25 year old women with their fourth miscarriage, having lost the foetus each time to the physical violence their husband inflicted each time they declined to have sex. There are the older brides, married for a decade or more, their bodies bearing scars and vaginal tears of different ages, suggesting repeated sexual violence.

Occasionally, new mothers arrive with the stitches from their C-section reopened, oozing with blood and pus, sharing that their husbands tried to have sex immediately after delivery. It takes four to six weeks after childbirth for the mother's body to heal to a considerable extent. But a wife has obligations, and husbands can't wait that long.

Strenuous household labour and the pressure of caring singlehanded for the newborn keep her occupied through the day. At night her exhausted body must quietly cater to her husband's sexual expectation. Non-consensual sex in a marriage can either be a heinous crime or a sacred duty, depending where you were born. Pooja, all of nineteen, had to be referred to surgery instead of gynaecology because she needed reconstruction of her anal sphincter which was completely torn due to attempted anal intercourse.

When I visited Pooja to check on her after the surgery, she told me it was an act of love-making gone wrong. Some of the men force themselves on their wives three or four times a day, occasionally in front of their children, not stopping even when she screams or cries or actively resists. Some others were encouraged by their parents to consistently have sex irrespective of her wishes, to get her pregnant sooner.

There were women whose bodies and lives were turned into rehabilitation centres for their alcoholic partners. There were women infected by HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, which their husbands contracted elsewhere. There were women who love women, and were expected to love men after years of "corrective rape" perpetrated by their husbands, and there were survivors of cervical cancer expected to "function normally" now that the disease was gone. What these women had in common, as far as I could determine, was that ideas of consent or marital rape were missing from their imagination and vocabulary.

The historian Tanika Sarkar describes how the concept of consent was first recognised in Indian jurisprudence when a four-year-old married girl allegedly "chose" to immolate herself. Child marriages were still deemed legal, until the gruesome death of a ten-year-old girl from injuries incurred during marital rape raised the legal minimum age of conjugal cohabitation to twelve. This criminalisation of marital intercourse below the age of 12 saw large scale protests where people cried, Hinduism is in danger.

"A girl's consent now came to mean her bodily capacity to bear intercourse without serious damage," wrote Sarkar in her paper titled *The Prehistory of Rights: The Age of Consent Debate in Colonial Bengal*. This culture and jurisprudence of consent has seen little change in the last one hundred twenty years.

Although sexual violence is typically underreported in surveys, the National Family Health Survey in 2015 found that 9% of ever-married women between the ages of 15-49 reported that they had faced sexual violence. 83% of those respondents said their current spouse was the perpetrator, and another 7% said it was their former spouse.

A marital rape is still not recognised in law, rape survivors generally file a divorce petition against their husbands citing IPC sections pertaining to criminal intimidation and insulting the modesty of a woman.

The Domestic Violence Act too, while recognising sexual abuse in a marriage, only offers civil remedy in terms of protection or monetary relief. Marital rape survivors looking for redress in criminal law file cases under the IPC sections dealing with causing 'hurt', 'grievous hurt' or the 'cruelty' clause in Section 498A – but the maximum punishment allowed is much lower than for rape.

Today at least 70 countries around the world have criminalised marital rape, taking years to refine legislations in order to cover cases like "mistaken belief of consent by the husband due to a history of rough sex", "transmission of sexually transmitted diseases", "rape performed under the influence of alcohol", etc. India is not one of them.

For women like Subhashree or Pooja, sex becomes synonymous with rape because that's the only way they have ever encountered it. It is an act which is never about the woman, never about pleasure, always about trauma reinforced over trauma.

They are discouraged from developing any sense of personal space, ownership over their bodies, or righteousness regarding bodily integrity since that would cause inconvenience to the innumerable patriarchal worlds we are in. "Within a marriage, fighting back has consequences," writes author Meena Kandasamy in her book *When I Hit You*.

"The man who rapes me is not a stranger who runs away. He is someone who wakes up next to me. I begin to learn that there are no screams that are loud enough to make my husband stop. There are no screams that cannot be silenced by the shock of a tight slap."



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A MOTHER DIES

Dr. Shantanu Abhyankar

14 April 2020, shantanuabhyankar.blogspot.com

She was wheeled into my OPD and hauled over onto the examination table. She lay there bloated and edematous and pulseless with a nine-month tense, shiny belly bump. She was convulsing all the while, frothing at the mouth and snorting and then suddenly, she died.

She stayed somewhere beyond Mahabalwshwar, in the Tapola woods, across the Koyna backwaters. She had her first convulsion early in the morning. People trekked for two hours to reach the road while carrying her in a hammock. Finally, after an hour's wait by the roadside, they got into a Jeep, driving up the Ghat to Mahabaleshwar and rolling down to Panchgani and Wai. It had taken her seven hours to reach my hospital.

After she was declared dead, I got busy filling up the numerous papers and forms. I don't object to filling out paperwork because my views were meaningless, anyway. Her death was now a part of a national problem. It was 'maternal death', and the administration would investigate it. They would push reports and queries around as papers piled up. There would be meetings, inquiries and discussions. All this makes me feel gloomy as her death would pervade my thoughts all day long. Any death pains a doctor, but this one was even more painful. A young mother dying just for timely intervention makes me feel helpless and inadequate. It was her third pregnancy. I wondered what would happen to the three motherless children? How will they manage?

Four months later, one morning, I received a call from the District Collector's office. A rude voice ordered me to be present for a meeting at 11 a.m. sharp the next day. Eleven was the most inconvenient hour for me as I had scheduled appointments. It was impossible to reschedule them all at such short notice. But I had to fall in line as you can't argue with the authorities.

Though I was uneasy, I attended the meeting as an inquiry into such deaths was necessary. Moreover, they help identify the weaknesses in the system. For example, the injured pregnant lady had sought help at three places on the way but was asked to shift to other clinics.

Her post-mortem report wasn't even ready yet. So the standard remark reading, 'viscera preserved, opinion reserved', stared back at me from the papers—just another customary routine. Viscera is removed and examined in the forensic laboratory to rule out homicide, an illness, or poisoning. It wasn't at all necessary in this case. The cause of death was evident from her history. The government doctor just wanted to be extra sure or shift the onus of the final opinion.

She suffered from high blood pressure, which was overlooked as she convulsed due to Eclampsia and went into status eclamptic, a state of continuous convulsions, leading to her death. Eclampsia, a result of high blood pressure during pregnancy, strikes like a lightning bolt. Three doctors saw her on the way, all making the exact diagnosis and then sent her to me.

A delayed post mortem report meant another call from the District office for another meeting and another missed appointment. I was about to vent my frustration with the system when I heard the Civil Surgeon was arriving late for the meeting. I was, however, told he had the report with him, which was a relief! Then began what's known as a 'verbal' post mortem. I had certified that the death was just incidental as I had had no chance to treat or even examine her. This was now my chance to have a ringside view of the government's work.

The district collector cross-examined everyone, including visitors, to her hut. He inquired about the sub-centre in her village and the ASHA worker responsible for her area. The District Collector was a doctor who later opted for the Civil Service and naturally felt the loss. He, therefore, spared no one and dissected the flaws in the administration. He identified every weakness in the chain, giving instructions and passing down orders to overcome further issues.

The ASHA worker had not checked the pregnant lady for four months. According to her, 'the people in the locality were uncooperative. They just ignored the health workers. The men are mostly drunk and busy bootlegging, and the women are also into moonshine. The medical officer-in-charge, too, keeps away from this area, worried about hooligans and molestation.' The ASHA worker before her appointment hadn't reported a single pregnancy. "I have dutifully registered her name. I have done my duty. Done what I could." The medical officer of the sub-centre, a woman,

was asked why she wasn't staying in the locality. 'I don't, but even if I were staying there, I was on leave on that very day.' According to her, she had to rush back to her hometown as her father in law suddenly fell ill. She produced the older man's death certificate and the recording of the phone calls with her superiors asking for emergency leave.

The patient's family brought her to a small dispensary on the way. The elderly doctor examined her in the jeep itself. Her relatives were angry because he didn't even bother to record her blood pressure. "Feeling the pulse is enough for me to diagnose such high blood pressure", was his explanation. The Collector looked at me. "Her GC (general condition) was very poor," the elderly doctor continued, "there wasn't the need to waste time recording the BP. I don't have the necessary injections anyway. I don't keep them. There was no point in any detailed examination since I treat such patients. I asked them to reach the hospital as soon as possible. I did my duty. I did whatever was possible." He wasn't wrong. He had practised 'triage'. One concentrates on the soldiers one can save and ignore those beyond help on a battlefield. However, if one attempts to salvage all, the better ones worsen and die. He had rightly sensed that this complication was beyond his abilities and refused to treat the patient.

The next stop was a more extensive, better-equipped hospital. The doctor there had the necessary injections, knew the doses but hadn't even offered first aid. He had just directed the patient to me. The Collector was angry at the clear case of negligence. But the doctor calmly said, "by this time, the patient had deteriorated further. She had vomited and aspirated the vomitus; there were audible rales all over her chest, her lips cyanosed, and her breathing was barely discernible. In short, she was sure to die within minutes. Any 'first' aid would be her last. I didn't want to risk treating her," he said. The Collector's brow furrowed. Then, the doctor explained, "the people from this locality had a notorious reputation. They created a scene at the hospital next door just a week ago. Their patient was well but disgruntled about the fees they had ganged up on, threatened to shatter the place, paid nothing and left!"

There was an awkward silence. Then, finally, the doctor continued, 'The woman was to die despite my injections. But the relatives would have shattered my hospital, blaming the injection for her death. At that hour, neither your police nor your law would have been of help, would it? Had I been 100% sure that my hospital would not be targeted, I would

have given the injection, knowing that it was futile to do so. But do you guarantee my safety? I saved and protected my hospital, my staff and myself. It's been four months since this death. You have summoned me today to explain my position. I have just this to say, I have safely delivered 160 women since and saved as many women and children. I have done my duty as far as I could. Haven't I?"

There was another awkward silence. Finally, the Civil Surgeon hurriedly entered, joined the meeting, and narrated the report. "It's a fact that she was full-term," he said, "it's also a fact that she had high blood pressure and suffered from convulsions. But, the convulsions were not due to high blood pressure. The convulsions came and persisted due to a cerebral bleed. The bleed in the brain resulted from trauma, resulting from her husband banging her head against a stone." This punishment was meted out to her because the curry she had cooked was too bland.

A stunned silence descended on the room.

Then, I got an urgent call from my hospital about a pregnant woman convulsing. I took leave and started to speed back to my hospital.

(Translated from Marathi to English)



Dr. Shantanu Abhyankar is a renowned gynaecologist practising in rural areas for the past 25 years. He has chaired the national committee on sexual medicine and was awarded the Dr Anandibai Joshi Gaurav Puraskar. He has a YouTube channel with more than 9 million hits that tackles the anxieties and misconceptions about sex and sexuality for adolescents.

WOMEN SAFETY: A DYSFUNCTIONAL TOLL-FREE WOMEN HELPLINE IN WEST BENGAL; ASSAM HELPLINE LACKS SUFFICIENT FUNDS

Purnima Sah

29 October 2020, gaonconnection.com

As per the National Crime Records Bureau 2019, West Bengal and Assam are among the top-five states in crime against women. West Bengal's toll-free 24/7 helpline is dysfunctional while its landline helpline works only five days a week during office hours. Assam's helpline is under-staffed and cash-strapped.

Cooch Behar, West Bengal - Shubhashree Majumdar (name changed) of Alipurduar in West Bengal, about 730 kilometres from the state capital Kolkata, was only 19 years old when she married her boyfriend. Within a year, they had a daughter. Majumdar wanted to study more and become self-reliant, but her husband would have none of it. "He would lock me up before he left for work. When my daughter fell ill, my neighbours broke the lock and helped me reach the hospital. When my husband came to know, he beat me black and blue," she narrated to Gaon Connection.

She is divorced from her husband, but says she has lost 25 years of her life to a bad marriage. "People ask me why I stayed quiet for so many years and not called the police. I didn't even know there were helpline numbers to help women like us," she said.

In Cooch Behar, less than 25 kms away from where Majumdar lives, is Madhuri Ghosh (name changed), who had a difficult childhood. Her parents ill treated her, because she was a girl, she said. When other kids her age were playing and studying, her mother made her do the household chores and often starved her.

At 22, she grabbed at what she thought was an escape, and eloped and got married. Barely a couple of years into the marriage, the beatings and the mental abuse began. "We had a son and I found out my husband was having an extra marital affair. When I questioned him, he would beat me up. Who do I report my whole life to?" Ghosh asked Gaon

Connection. Unlike Majumdar, Ghosh continues to live with her husband and their now 16-year-old son. There are a number of young girls and women like Majumdar and Ghosh who suffer physical and mental abuse, sometimes all their lives, but do not know where to turn for help.

Although the states in India have set up dedicated toll-free helplines for women, many are unaware of them. As per the recently released National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2019 report, crime against women (reported cases) is on the rise in the country from 345,989 cases in 2017 to 391,601 in 2019. Uttar Pradesh tops the list with 59,853 reported cases in 2019. West Bengal and Assam, who make it to the top-five states, are also not far behind at 30,394 and 30,025 reported cases of crime against women in 2019, respectively. Incidentally, West Bengal failed to provide its 2019 data for crime against women, hence its 2018 data had to be used in the 2019 report. Both the eastern states have women helplines, but unlike Assam, which has a dedicated toll-free number, the toll-free helpline in West Bengal (1091) is still to function. For now, there are landline helpline numbers which work only during weekdays between 10 am and 5.30pm.

The West Bengal Commission for Women's helpline (033-2359-5610 / 2359-5609 / 2321-0154) is available only (emphasis added) during office hours (10 am to 5.30 pm) from Monday to Friday. It is only recently that the chairperson of the West Bengal Commission for Women, Leena Gangopadhyay (98309 47247) made public her mobile number considering the surge in the number of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

West Bengal: Toll-free helpline doesn't work, One-Stop-Centre missing
The West Bengal Commission for Women, started way back in 1993, has a chairperson, vice-chairperson and nine other members (all of them women), a secretary, two counsellors and two law officers (both women), and a media consultant. All of them attend incoming calls on the landline helpline numbers during office hours from Monday to Friday.

"There is no specific staff to run the helpline numbers, we handle every call. We also have to be available on our designated mobile numbers 24/7. Several NGOs are also working with us in various locations," Subhadeep Bhattacharya, media consultant, West Bengal Commission for Women, told Gaon Connection. "There is a proposal to have a 24/7

toll free helpline number,” Gangopadhyay added. But right now, people have to send in written complaints to the West Bengal Commission for Women, by email, SMS or a WhatsApp message.

Those who do not have access to mobile phones have to send in a handwritten complaint. “The difficulty during this pandemic is that women are not able to come and report cases like they used to before,” she said. As per Kolkata police website, on the International Women’s Day, 1091 was announced as the toll-free woman helpline number for the state. However, 1091 is not active yet.

Gaon Connection reporter made several attempts to call this toll-free number, but could not get through. When contacted, the Kolkata Police Booth (98300 79999) was unable to explain why the toll-free 1091 number was not active and shared another number (8017100100) that turned out to be an Anti-Stalking Helpline number meant only for the residents of Kolkata, and not other parts of the state. While the toll-free number seems only on paper, the landline helpline numbers are often hard to reach. Many women complained that either the lines are engaged or no one picks up their call when they are in need. When a Gaon Connection reporter called up the landline helpline of the Women Grievance Cell (033 2250 5175) given by the Kolkata Police (033 2250 5000), there was no response.

The situation is even worse at district levels. For instance, in Cooch Behar district, the post of protection officer for domestic violence has been lying vacant for almost a year now. The legal probation officer is doing both the jobs.

According to Bhattacharya, apart from a 24/7 toll-free helpline, One Stop Centres in the state would help matters. While the helpline centres rescue the victim, thereafter the woman has to visit the police station to file an FIR, go to a hospital for treatment, collect the medical reports, then meet legal officers, a counselor and so on. On the other hand, One Stop Centres have all the services under one roof and the victim does not need to run from pillar to post. Efforts were made to set up such centres in the state, but nothing concrete has happened so far. While there was a proposal to set up a One Stop Centre in Cooch Behar a year and a half ago, it came to nought.

“We were told to select a government institute to set up the centre. The building was selected, the public works department was supposed to inaugurate it and they even fixed a budget for it,” Snehashis Chowdhury, district child protection officer, Cooch Behar, revealed to Gaon Connection.

The Cooch Behar Medical College was selected as the venue and a list of those to be employed was also prepared. The centre was launched. But, the fund that was supposed to be sanctioned by the Women and Child Development and Social Welfare never came. It has been six months, but the One Stop Centre is yet to become a reality.

Assam asks for aid

The neighbouring state of Assam, reported the highest rate of crimes against women (per lakh population), according to NCRB data, 2019. Unlike West Bengal, Assam has one helpline – 181 – and 33 Sakhi One Stop Centers across the state’s 33 districts, which were launched six months ago. Whenever a call is registered on 181, the case is transferred to the nearest Sakhi Centre, so it is easier to reach the victim. From March 29, 2018 to October 6, 2020, Women Helpline Assam has received 2,731 calls for help, for cases of crimes against women that include kidnapping, property dispute, cyber crimes, sexual violence domestic violence and desertion.

On some days the helplines receive about four distress calls, and there are days when the number of SOS calls go up to even 10. “The sheer number of people appealing for help is overwhelming the helpline officials who are struggling to help the survivors. Around 70 per cent of cases received by 181 Women Helpline Assam, fall under the domestic violence category,” Neelakshi Sarma, Manager, 181 Women Helpline, Assam, told Gaon Connection.

For instance, Riya Barua (name changed), a class VIII student in Udalguri district of Assam, was sexually abused by her father for five years before her elder brother found out and complained to the 181 Women Helpline in Assam. “He often hit mother and hurt her physically. Every time he drank alcohol, he wanted me to be with him. What is strange is that my mother didn’t do anything about it despite knowing this was happening to me,” Riya told Gaon Connection. It was only when Riya informed her sister-in-law over a phone call, that her brother called 181 and the police

came to arrest the accused who is behind bars now and the case is in the Special Court. Even though Assam has a dedicated women helpline and Sakhi One Stop Centre in each of its districts, the helpline services are understaffed and overworked.

At present, Women Helpline Assam has 12 coordinators who are working in the call centre on shift basis along with two lawyers. "Not only are they buried under the deluge of distress calls, they are poorly paid, and are on eleven-month contracts. Often their salaries are delayed and they get paid anything between Rs 12,000 and Rs 40,000," Sarma told Gaon Connection. She spoke about the problem of official apathy and indifference that hampered their work. "In order to get orders under the domestic violence act, we need to depend on the advocates from the District Legal Service Authority and this is where our real struggle begins," she said, adding how the advocates who are paid by the government are indifferent and disinclined to help. "We also prepare the survivor's petition and share it with the advocates so that they don't charge the survivor money," she added. According to her, the reason why Assam is among the top five states with highest reported cases of crime against women is because the state encourages women to report cases.

Meanwhile, the Women Helpline Assam hopes to widen its reach. It plans to integrate the National Legal Services Authority Helpline 15100 (NALSA provides free legal services to people who are in need of it). "Our idea is that we will bear the cost of installing the helpline. All the government needs to do is place five lawyers in our office and take care of the telephone bills. Once this helpline is integrated with the lawyers and helplines within our office premises, it will lead to a stronger coordination," Sarma explained.

While helplines struggle for money for even the most basic of infrastructure, it is significant that there is a corpus of money that is lying underutilised, the union ministry of women and child development, by its own admission revealed.

The Nirbhaya Fund that was set up in 2013, to rehabilitate survivors of sexual violence and implement schemes to help them pick up the pieces of their lives, has set aside Rs 3,024.46 crore for this very purpose. But, only 63 per cent of it has been utilised in the last seven years. Of

it, Assam is one of the states that has used only 32.06 per cent of the funds allotted to it while West Bengal is one of the top utilisers at 81.7 per cent.

Often, toll-free helplines provide the much needed help at hand to women in distress. They are the stepping stones in controlling crime against women in the country. States need to go beyond just setting up these helplines if women have to feel safe. Systems should be put in place and streamlined in order to enable Helpline staff to function more efficiently. Regular salary, better leave entitlement and more facilities, can go a long way in increasing their efficiency in reaching out to more women in distress.



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FROM NIRBHAYA TO DISHA : THE GROWING RAPE CULTURE AND IT'S SOLUTIONS WITHOUT SEARCHING THE ROOT CAUSES

C.Vanaja

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It is not to say that such horrendous incidents did not happen before Nirbhaya or after that, yet both the incidents of Nirbhaya and Disha have a particular significance. These instances jolted the middle classes and the millennial generation, a section that lived in the blissful privileged upbringing that taught them neither their rights nor duties. They only imbibed values of competition instead of cooperation, success instead of satisfaction and selfishness instead of sacrifice. Both incidents only brought out empathy as the rape victims hailed from 'their middle class.' People who never raised their voice against several similar or even more brutal rapes of Dalits and minorities, even in police stations and military-ruled regions, now come out onto the streets.

With a sense of anger, frustration and helplessness, these people could not digest that there was no security that they believed existed. The same people who rejected counter-violence as a misguided value suddenly started posing counterviolence as a solution. At the time of the Nirbhaya incident, the demand to hang the accused grew multifold, and by the time of Disha's case, the public demanded the amputation and lynching of the accused. Perhaps this was an indication of their silent consent to the growing lynching culture in the country.

Looking back at the Nirbhaya incident, there was significant demand for instant justice by activists working for human rights and feminist activists on other rapes cases. However, the government was not as enthusiastic about promoting violence. Consequently, the Justice Verma Commission was formed. After considering the opinions of thousands of people, in his report, Justice Verma did not support the demand for capital punishment that emerged from some sections of people. Justice Verma also stated that the death penalty would only lead to the victim's killing, to erase evidence in a country where rape is reported every ten minutes. Thus, the report prescribed rigorous punishments and fast-track courts' quick

delivery of justice. He also recommended several changes to the penal code. Mainly, he prescribed stringent penalties to various types of harassment, usually treated as minor and with indifference by society and institutions.

Justice Verma's report did not restrict the problem to just crime and punishment and recommended reforms in essential institutions to prevent gender-based crimes. He firstly and elaborately discussed police reforms by raising gender sensitivity training. Next, he advised the police to register a crime when the victims complained, irrespective of jurisdiction. Finally, he suggested action against those who refuse to register complaints. Similarly, his suggestions included setting up security commissions at the state level, forming rape crisis cells to investigate rapes, providing necessary support by providing information at all levels.

Justice Verma also recommended reforms amongst politicians and parliamentarians. He said those who committed gender-based crimes could not sit in state legislatures and parliament. He suggested that the People's Representation Act be amended to deny such people an opportunity to contest elections. The third set of reforms aimed at including gender and sex education in all educational institutions starting from the school level. He also suggested teaching gender equality to all those outside educational institutions through adult education. Finally, in its last leg, the UPA government proposed amendments in the laws on sexual harassment and assaults and added the death penalty to gang rape, though Justice Verma specifically opposed it.

The new government threw the recommendations of the Justice Verma Commission. Instead, they made significant amendments to the POCSO Act, like reducing the age to 16 years, apparently to prevent minors from escaping punishment for heinous crimes. Introducing these amendments in parliament, minister Maneka Gandhi even said, "poverty cannot be a justification for crime", implying that horrific crimes perpetrated by uneducated poor or their age should not come in the way of punishing them. Indeed, that was the most popular opinion in society as the Nirbhaya and Disha cases accused were minors and uneducated poor. But, is it true that only poor children are committing such crimes? Are the other children not involved? Why do children of any economic group commit such crimes?

According to the official statistics, of the 90 per cent of children joining primary schools (another misconception where school registers list all the children in the village, irrespective of their attendance), half of them drop out by the time of secondary school. By adolescence, most of these poor children have dropped out. Girls from such backgrounds have their reasons to drop out by then.

Similarly, domestic violence is common in Indian families, even though we boast of the Indian family as a pious institution. Particularly after post-liberalisation and globalisation, pressures on the family have increased manifold. As the state's dependence on excise revenue increased, alcohol consumption and domestic violence have also grown. These pressures have broken families, and single-parent families have become common. What is the predicament of children aged 13-14 from such families? They do not have the correct skill-sets to find gainful employment. These children, who crave love, security and self-respect, can easily procure a smartphone for a thousand rupees and unlimited data for about a hundred rupees. Children who were never exposed to gender sensitivity or sex education can quickly access no-holds-barred porn. Some children have seen a lot of violence throughout their lives and become immune to a state of indifferent acceptance of violence. Some cultivate aggressive, violent attitudes from exposure to highly glamorised violence in films. In this scenario, the only thing missing is a vulnerable victim. The governments that did not provide a respectable life guaranteed by the constitution to these kids jump to bring out more stringent laws to punish if they commit any mistake.

However, we cannot only blame any particular population for such crimes. Let us look at the middle class; they are also not far removed from these instincts of violence. India is a country where 90 per cent of men and even a large percentage of women feel that wife-beating is necessary to maintain our family system. The primary ingredients of marriage as an institution are not the values like equality, respect and love, but caste, dowry and are fuelled by domination. Violence, in any measure, is an accepted value to maintain and protect dominance. A similar relationship exists between wife and husband and between parents and children. The roles are clearly defined - those who order and those who follow, those who decide and those who obey. Children cannot possibly learn any concept of equality in this kind of unequal setting. Even if the children are taught gender equality, the familial roles

are steeped in caste and economic inequality, not allowing the children to learn or follow the values of equality. Instead, they learn to manage and manipulate according to their needs and opportunity.

On the other hand, scenes of violence are prevalent in young children's minds from when they are young. Many children start to watch cartoons like Tom and Jerry at age one or two. These cartoons portray highly aggressive and violent behaviour. But the aggression is shown as a form of play and entertainment. Children who grow up with these cartoons treat beating as a play losing sensitivity towards the pain. These are the traits that encourage children in school to enjoy bullying in the name of fun. Tom and Jerry to Chota Bheem then lead children to play similar violent games on their phones and tabs. As they grow older, they graduate to games of bloodshed like PUBG. By the time they reach their teens, they get accustomed to violence, aggression and weapons as a form of entertainment. The act of killing an opponent is seen as a symbol of success without any guilt. By their 12-13 years, they become curious about their sexuality. Their questions are not answered in schools that brush aside sex education and gender education. Neither is anyone at home discussing these topics driving these children to find answers online.

On the other hand, middle-class houses keep streaming television serials thriving on hatred, revenge and melodrama. Or else they watch news bulletins that sensationalise and glorify violence. Indian films also portray unbearable violence and the glamorisation of insensitivity with stereotypical dialogues. The whole family watches the scenes and listens to these dialogues without any criticism and implied consent to such behaviour and attitude. The openly aggressive and gender-insensitive exchanges encourage toxic masculinity, become routine during family and social occasions, and even reverberate in political discussions.

Another aspect is gender violence and is not restricted to just beating or scolding. Some films show heroism which means chasing a girl and "wanting to have her", declaring that she is his own and making her his property. Such films are blockbusters in all Indian languages today. These films are either seen in cinema halls or on television screens under the garb of the AU certificate. If elders see it on television, younger ones watch it on phones, but everybody has access to them despite their certification.

Every individual looks for satisfaction in their work and personal life, and attaining both of these becomes essential in the prime of one's youth. However, in a country with a dubious distinction of 40-year high in unemployment, one cannot necessarily lead a respectable life despite having very high levels of education. Depression, unemployment, and frustration lead to the only opportunity to prove his manliness through sexual supremacy or gender violence. Lately, we've been hearing of engineering students raping their classmates.

Moving up the social ladder, recent Whatsapp conversations of students in higher classes where only the rich and powerful sent their children leaked out. They revealed the discussions of under-15 boys discussing how they wanted to rape the girls in their class. It discussed details of their sexual desires. But there was a lot of effort to conceal these messages and stop the news from leaking out. This is why none of the rich and powerful families ever get prosecuted in such cases.

Then who are the victims? They may be the girls of Hajipur, who did not have a bus to go to school in the state that boasts of 'Beti Padao Beti Bachao' and have to walk four or five miles in desolate bushy routes. It may be the month old toddler sleeping innocently beside her mother. It may be Disha who thought it would be safe to park her scooter in such a crowded area. It may be Manasa who trusted her friend. It may be Teku Lakshmi who was in a hurry to reach home after a long tiring day. It may be Ayesha Meera or Pratyusha or some known or unknown name. The truth is that violence is growing among people irrespective of their class. But only when the perpetrator is from the poor or middle class does the crime become news, and the accused get punished. On the other hand, suppose the criminals are from the upper classes with the proper political backing, then the truth never comes out like the Pratyusha case. The real perpetrators never get booked in such cases, as in the Ayesha Meera case.

Society and the state produce the perpetrators and the victims in a way that never take responsibility for changing or reforming them and further raise the demand for stringent punishments only when a terrible crime surfaces. The governments that provide hundreds of crores for statues fail to assist the rape victims. They take every opportunity to boast about the Indian culture but do nothing to check the rape culture. The governments capable of spreading the message of compulsory polio drops to every

village can also use the same network to educate men about consent. The need is to plug these loopholes in society and the administration rather than point fingers at the criminal. The act of killing the criminal gains prominence over killing the crime. When the criminals become political leaders and crime become authority and rules, it always needs small fish for the big fish to eat.

Police machinery plays a crucial role in crime and punishment. This is evident from Justice Verma's list of reforms that first recommends sensitising the police force. When the police get a complaint of a missing woman, whether a 10-year-old girl or an elderly 70-year-old senior citizen, their first response is to judge the woman's character. A woman who complains of domestic violence is also considered someone who probably deserved it and tries to destroy family prestige. A rape case is seen as a nuisance. Generally, the police show criminal negligence towards most crimes against women. The negligence begins by not registering an FIR, not filing charge sheets or filing improper ones; all these failures lead to lower conviction rates.

On the other hand, when there is an incident of rape, the Panchayats, to police stations to courts, are more than enthusiastic about making compromises and arranging marriages. Sometime back, even the Chennai High Court exuded such exuberance and withdrew after the Supreme Court's intervened. This proves the widespread negligence and approval towards rape culture.

This negligent attitude encourages mistakes. When Nirbhaya fought for her life on the road with severe injuries, precious time was wasted identifying the proper jurisdiction. The recommendations of the Justice Verma Commission on the training of gender sensitivity and his advice on the ways to handle crimes against women have still not been executed. Ultimately even in the Disha case, the same kind of criminal negligence was evident. When the worried parents called the police that their daughter was in trouble, one precious hour was wasted identifying the correct jurisdiction to file the case. When the parents finally found out the jurisdiction and complained, the police officer had the cheek to comment that she might have eloped with somebody. This audacity and rudeness are the outcomes of criminal negligence.

It is a fact that Disha would have survived if there had been an immediate response. The establishment that cannot answer the loss due to its criminal negligence is now trying to overcome that guilt and change its image by killing the accused in a fake encounter. Disha would have survived if the same establishment had changed its ways and attitude after committing the same blunder leading to the death of three young girls in Hajipur. Other officers would have learned the lesson if any action had been initiated against the officer who spoke in the same vein in Hajipur. This establishment that is more interested in punishing crimes cannot do that.

Anyway, there are no chances lessons will be learnt for changes. Gender sensitivity has to be encouraged and taught. Unfortunately, our state does not have that much time or willingness to impart the correct training on sensitivity. It is enough to book those who question the status quo in false cases and keep them inside jails. It is enough to make a fake encounter to dispel the public anger that may arise once in a while. Probably, strengthened by the present encounter and the colossal response, they might continue to kill somebody in a meeting instead of booking an innocent and keeping him in jail for years together as in the Ayesha Meera case. It is just like raping and killing to erase the evidence.

Usually, two other arguments come up after these kinds of gory incidents. One is that these incidents occur because of how girls dress up. This attitude is a typical tactic for victim-blaming and refusal to recognise the problem, or even worse, to cover up the mentality. Another argument is blaming the family for being irresponsible in child upbringing. But now the situation has changed. For some parents, their life itself is a struggle, and for some others, it is a constant fight for success. Children grow up in closed houses or schools where no one has time for children. There is no playing, no singing, no wholesome entertainment. Perhaps, children have never before been subjected to this kind of pressure. There is a proverb that an entire village rears a child. However, society and governments feel no responsibility in collectively creating situations for the betterment of the youth; instead, they jump to punish them at the first instance of their wrongdoing.

However, is society alone to be blamed for such growing pressure in social life? Aren't our policies responsible for turning life into a pressure cooker? Why does the entire country lag in the happiness index? Why does it feel as if an aggressive atmosphere engulfs us? Why does everybody lose

confidence in all institutions? Why is killing and amputating becoming a form of justice?

If a country's culture has to change, the style of governance must change first. When members of Parliament and Assemblies themselves are charged with sexual offences, how can they change the culture of rape in the country? Otherwise, we may have to wait till the following brutal incident. Meanwhile, the little education and the few jobs women have gained over the last five or ten decades will erode with growing insecurity. By then, the idea of a gender-just society will not even remain a dream.

(Translated from Telugu to English)



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महिलाओं के 'चरमसुख' यानी ऑर्गेज़म पर चुप्पी नहीं बात करना ज़रूरी है

ऐश्वर्या अमृतविजयराज

20 नवंबर 2020, फेमिनिज्मइन्डिया.कॉम

फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म वही शब्द है जिसे एक बॉलीवुड फिल्म 'वीरे दी वेडिंग' में नायिका अपनी दोस्तों के साथ हंसी-ठिठोली करते हुए 'चरमसुख' कहती है। साल 2019 में ड्यूरेक्स कॉन्डम ने अपने एक ऐड कैंपेन में हैशटैग चलाया था #OrgasmInequality। इस कैंपेन में बताया गया था कि 70% से अधिक भारतीय महिलाएं सेक्स करते हुए ऑर्गेज़म का अनुभव नहीं करती। एक रियलिटी शो में विद्या बालन ने औरतों के ऑर्गेज़म के बारे में कहा था, "औरतों को यह पसंद है, उन्हें इसकी ज़रूरत है और वे इसे इतना ही चाहती हैं जितना कि कोई पुरुष।" आखिर महिलाओं के ऑर्गेज़म अनुभव करने या नहीं करने के पीछे क्या किस्सा है, क्यों हमारे घरों और समाज में इस पर इतनी कम बातचीत होती, आइए इस लेख में जानें विस्तार से।

भले ही आज के फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म के बारे में बात करने को समाज मंजूरी नहीं देता लेकिन इसका इतिहास आपको नया दृष्टिकोण देगा। हमेशा से यह विषय नैतिक तकिये और संस्कृति के ढोंग के नीचे दबाकर नहीं रखा गया था। 'बसल' में छपी एक रिपोर्ट के मुताबिक मध्यकालीन समाज में रोमांस पर लिखे गए उपन्यास चाहे आपको जो कहें लेकिन उस समय समाज की यह एक प्रचलित मान्यता थी कि महिलाएं सेक्स के दौरान ऑर्गेज़म की प्राप्ति वैसे ही करने में सक्षम थी जैसे पुरुष थे। 1700 के दशक में औरतों के शरीर को देखे जाने का नज़रिया बदलने लगा था। इतिहास और स्त्री स्वास्थ्य विशेषज्ञ एमिली ब्रांड कहती हैं, "किसी भी पद या वर्ग के पुरुष के लिए सेक्स को उसकी चाहत का अहम हिस्सा माना जाने लगा। लेकिन महिलाओं के लिए यह एक नैतिक रेखा की तरह थी, जो इसे पार कर जाए उसकी कोई वापसी नहीं थी। वैवाहिक रिश्तों में औरतों को सेक्स का आनंद लेने से मनाही थी।" 1800 के दौर में महिलाओं के यौनिक ज़रूरतों को 'हिस्टेरिया' नाम के शब्द से मेडिकल शब्दकोश में डाल दिया गया। जब भी किसी औरत की पेल्विक मांसपेशियां हलचल करती और इस कारण वह परेशानी महसूस करती उसे हिस्टीरिया माना जाता। 'विचरती बच्चेदानी' जैसा शब्द ऐसी महिलाओं के साथ जोड़ा गया। डॉक्टर इसे ठीक करने के लिए 'वाइब्रेटर' का इस्तेमाल करने लगे। यह 'वाइब्रेटर' उन्हें यौन सुख और ऑर्गेज़म देने की मंशा से नहीं

बल्कि उनकी यह कथित बीमारी ठीक करने के लिए उपलब्ध थे। महिलाओं के पार्टनर या वह खुद इसका इस्तेमाल अपनी यौन सुख पाने के लिए नहीं करती थी। साल 1940 में अल्फ्रेड किंसले ने महिलाओं की यौनिकता पर एक बड़ा सर्वे किया। इस सर्वे और इसके परिणाम ने फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म को भ्रम, विचित्र घटना या प्रजनन से संबंधित होने के बजाय एक महिला की सेक्सुअलिटी से जुड़ा तथ्य मानकर सिद्ध किया।

किंसले ने लिखा, “40 फ्रीसद औरतें ऑर्गेज़म मास्टरबेशन के कारण महसूस करती हैं, 5% रात के सपनों (वेट ड्रीम) के कारण और 14 फ्रीसद औरतें एक ही बार में कई दफ़ा ऑर्गेज़म महसूस कर पाती हैं। सामान्य रूप से औरतों के ऑर्गेज़म महसूस करने की क्षमता 50-66 वर्ष के होने तक बढ़ती है।” महिलाओं की यौन इच्छा, आदतें, पसंद और यौन सुख के अलग-अलग तरीके व्यक्तिगत हो सकते हैं यह बात खुलकर सामने आई। साल 1960 के आस-पास का समय इस विषय पर आते नए-नए वैज्ञानिक सिद्धांतों का साल था। छोटे-छोटे कई वैज्ञानिक समूह फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म को इसी दुनिया की आम बात मान चुके थे। अब वे इसकी जैविक महत्ता जानना चाहते थे। कई तरह की थ्योरी सामने आती गई। जैसे, फ्रीमेल ऑर्गेज़म औरत के एक साथी के साथ रहने की सामाजिक संरचना को चुनौती देती है और यह कई मर्दों के साथ यौन संबंध स्थापित करने से जुड़ी बात है। हालांकि किसी भी वैज्ञानिक या थ्योरी ने अपने सिद्धांतों का सटीक विश्लेषण नहीं दिया।

उसी समय डॉडसन जो कि एक अमेरिकी सेक्स एजुकएटर थे, उन्होंने लिखा कि सेक्स टॉय को नारीवाद आंदोलन के साथ जोड़कर देखा जाना चाहिए। महिलाएं यौन सुख के लिए किसी पर निर्भर नहीं रहेंगी और यह उनकी आज़ादी के नए आयाम खोलेगा। इस थ्योरी ने बहुत आलोचनाएं झेलीं। कई नारीवादियों ने इसका ‘डिलडो’ (सेक्स टॉय) के पुरुष के लिंग के आकार के होने और इसे पुरुषों पर निर्भरता घटाने के बजाय शादियों को बचाने के नुस्खे की तरह देखा था। साल 2000 और उसके बाद के समय में इसे महिला के मूड, मन और स्वास्थ्य से जोड़कर देखा जाने लगा। भारतीय समाज और महिलाओं का ऑर्गेज़म भारतीय समाज में पवित्रता का भार औरतों के शरीर से होते हुए उसके चरित्र पर लादा जाता रहा है। औरतों के लिए सेक्स की प्रक्रिया शादी के बाद उनके पति को यौन सुख देने या बच्चे पैदा करने तक सीमित रखी गई है। बहुत कम औरतें ऐसी हैं जिन्हें यौन सुख प्राप्त करने के तरीके मालूम हो। उन्हें अपने शरीर को छूने और अपने शरीर के भेद खुद सुलझाने और इसी तरह से मास्टरबेशन की प्रक्रिया समझ पाने को लेकर घर के लोगों या स्कूलों में शिक्षित नहीं किया जाता। सेक्स एजुकेशन का पाठ किताब में होता है लेकिन इसे बच्चों तक सही-सही पहुंचाने

से समाज बचता रहा है। संस्कृति और सभ्यता के नाम पर महिलाओं के लिए कई अनकहे नियम गढ़े गए हैं।

पैर सटाकर बैठना, तन ढककर कपड़े पहनना, मर्दों के सामने सिकुड़कर रहना, धीरे बोलना, हौले चलना जैसे नियम तो हैं ही लेकिन उनके पास अपने ही शरीर को लेकर जानकारी की कमी है। सेक्स एक दोतरफ़ा क्रिया और संवाद है जिसका हिस्सा औरतें इस गहरी झिझक और 'शुद्धतावादी' सोच के कारण नहीं बन पाती। इसलिए वे अपने शारीरिक सुख की न चिंता करती हैं न पुरुष पार्टनर के सामने इसकी मांग रखती हैं। कई बार जब उनका साथी उनसे इस बारे में बात करना चाहे तब भी वह अपने मन में समाज द्वारा बिठाए सेक्स की परिभाषा से निकलकर अपनी यौन इच्छाओं को ज़ाहिर नहीं कर पाती। ये भी जानना ज़रूरी है कि हमेशा निपल या क्लिटोरिस की वज़ह से महसूस की गई उतेजना भी फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म का कारण हो सकती है। कई औरतों को ये नहीं पता होता क्योंकि उन्होंने अपने शरीर को समझने की कोशिश पहले कभी नहीं की होती है। इस सजगता की कमी के कारण उन्हें ऑर्गेज़म से जुड़ी किसी समस्या पर हल मिलना नामुकिन हो जाता है। आम लोग सिनेमा जगत को आधुनिक समझते हैं लेकिन साल 2020 में भी फिल्मों में फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म और मास्टरबेशन के सीन पर बहुत सारे लोग आहत हो जाते हैं। उन्हें महिलाओं की यौन इच्छाओं का खुला प्रदर्शन भाता नहीं है। फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म को लेकर बातचीत पर इतनी पहरेदारी है कि औरतें अपने शरीर को समझने में अपराधबोध महसूस करती हैं।

बैरी कोमिसरुक का रिसर्च इस विषय पर रहा कि कैसे ऑर्गेज़म दिमाग से जुड़ा हुआ है। वह कहते हैं, "शारीरिक रूप से विशेष बनावट रखने वाली महिलाओं को समझते हुए मैंने पाया है कि कुछ महिलाओं ने केवल योनि में हुई उतेजना के कारण ऑर्गेज़म पाया और कइयों ने केवल स्तन छुए जाने या कुछ सोचने कारण इसका अनुभव किया है।" द गार्जियन की एक रिपोर्ट में लिखा गया, "लेसबियन महिलाएं 75% सेक्सुअल प्रक्रिया में ऑर्गेज़म पाती हैं।" इसलिए एक पार्टनर को इस बात का अनुमान लगाने के बजाय साथी महिला पार्टनर से यह पूछना चाहिए कि उन्हें ऑर्गेज़म प्राप्त हुआ या नहीं। कई महिलाएं ऑर्गेज़म को फेक करती हैं। महिला के सेक्स अनुभव को बेहतर करने के लिए उनकी पसंद के बारे में बात करना बहुत ज़रूरी है। बिना उन्हें जज किए, बिना उन्हें नैतिकता के घिसे-पिटे सामाजिक चश्मे से देखे। यह बात ख़ासकर पुरुष साथी के लिए लागू होती है।

साल 2018 में मेडिकल न्यूज़ टुडे के एक सर्वे में बताया गया किन किन वजहों से महिला चरमसुख नहीं पा पाती। जैसे, रिश्ते की दिक्कतें, स्ट्रेस, मानसिक स्वास्थ्य, शारीरिक स्वास्थ्य,

गर्भ समापन, महिलाओं का खतना, यौन हिंसा की बुरी यादें, थोपी सिखाई-गई धार्मिक मान्यताएं आदी । सही सेक्स एजुकेशन की कमी में नवयुवक पोर्नोग्राफी से सेक्स के बारे में जानते हैं। इस वीडियो में दिखाया गया फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म और असल में होने वाले फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म में ज़मीन आसमान का अंतर है। महिलाओं के ऑर्गेज़म से उनकी हार्मोनल स्थिति का संबंध होता है। अलग-अलग महिला शरीर अलग-अलग तरह की उत्तेजना को ऑर्गेज़म का रूप देती हैं। यह सुख उनके मानसिक दबाव को हल्का करता है, इम्युनिटी बेहतर करता है, अच्छे यौन संबंध बनाने में मदद करता है।

ऑर्गेज़म के दौरान व्यक्ति को एक प्रकार का यौन उत्साह प्राप्त होता है, सेक्स में उत्तेजना बढ़ती है, अत्यधिक यौन सुख महसूस होता है, हृदय और रक्तचाप की गति बढ़ती है, कुछ महिलाएं पेल्विक और/या योनि के मांसपेशियों में हलचल अनुभव करती हैं। किसी का ऑर्गेज़म जल्दी नहीं होना उसे भावनात्मक या शारीरिक तौर पर 'कठोर' नहीं बनाता। यह भी जरूरी नहीं कि महिला जिससे भावनात्मक रूप से जुड़ी हो केवल उसी के साथ यह अनुभव कर सकती हैं। ये सारी बातें मिथ्या हैं। ये मिथ्य जमीनी स्तर पर तभी टूटेंगे जब महिलाएं समाज की बनाई रूढ़ियों को तोड़कर अपने शरीर और उसकी जरूरतों को महत्व देते हुए अपने सेक्सुअल पार्टनर से इस बारे में बात कर पाएं। औरतें जब अपने आसपास इन बातों पर अपना पक्ष रखेंगी तभी फीमेल ऑर्गेज़म बवाल के मुद्दे से उठकर आम बात बनकर उभरेगी, सिनेमा जगत सेक्स और ऑर्गेज़म को असभ्य महिला के चरित्र से बाहर एक सामान्य घरेलू औरत की जीवन की घटना की तरह दिखाने का कदम उठाएगा और वह फ़िल्में सराही जाएंगी। इसे शहरी 'औरत के चोंचले' बोलकर हटाए जाने की जगह हर वर्ग के समाज में इस पर बातचीत के आयाम खोले जाने की आवश्यकता है।



Aishwarya Amritvijayraj, a recent Philosophy graduate writes as a freelancer about gender and other social identities. A painter, a poet, and a visual medium artist, she constantly understands feminism not only in theory but through an inclusive perspective.

नवरुणा केस : अब अपनी बेटी के अवशेष का इंतज़ार कर रहे हैं माता-पिता

सौम्या ज्योत्सना

9 दिसंबर 2020, फेमिनिज्मइन्डिया.कॉम

एक बच्ची जब एक पल के लिए भी अपने माता-पिता की आंखों से ओझल हो जाती है, तब उसके माता-पिता बेचैन हो उठते हैं। अब आप सोचिए अगर एक बच्ची अपने माता-पिता की आंखों से बीते आठ सालों से ओझल हो, उस मां-बाप की स्थिति का अंदाज़ा आप लगा सकते हैं। बिहार के मुज़फ्फरपुर ज़िले के रहने वाले अतुल्य चक्रवर्ती और मैत्री चक्रवर्ती की आंखें आज भी अपनी बेटी को न्याय दिलाने के लिए तरसती हैं। साथ ही जितनी घबराहट और बैचेनी नवरुणा के माता-पिता को है, उतनी ही बैचेनी यहां के लोगों को भी है मगर उस बैचेनी को सीबीआई ने खत्म कर दिया है क्योंकि नवरुणा की हत्या/अपहरण गुत्थी आज तक नहीं सुलझ सकी है। बीते आठ सालों की तहकीकात के बाद भी नवरुणा कांड पर रहस्य का पर्दा बरकरार है।

नवरुणा की कहानी 18 सितंबर 2012 से शुरू होती है, जब जवाहर लाल रोड में रहने वाले अतुल्य और मैत्री चक्रवर्ती के घर से उनकी 12 साल की बेटी नवरुणा चक्रवर्ती का खिड़की के तीन सींखचो को तोड़कर अपहरण कर लिया जाता है। 19 सितंबर को जब मां अपनी बेटी को जगाने के लिए कमरे का दरवाज़ा खटखटाती है और जवाब ना मिलने पर बाहर जाकर खिड़की से झांकती है तो उनके होश उड़ जाते हैं। बेटी कमरे में नहीं मिलती है और आसपास कॉपी-किताब बिखरे हुए होते हैं। बेटी को कमरे में ना पाकर दोपहर तक माता-पिता संगे-संबंधियों के यहां पता लगाते हैं और आखिर में कोई समाचार नहीं मिलने पर वे कुछ लोगों के साथ मुज़फ्फरपुर नगर थाना पहुंचते हैं और अपनी बेटी की बरामदगी के लिए गुहार लगाते हैं। थानाध्यक्ष टालने वाला रवैया अपनाते हुए कहते हैं, “आवेदन दे दीजिए और जाकर आप भी पता लगाइए। कहीं वह खुद ही भाग गई होगी।” पुलिस के इस रवैये पर अतुल्य चक्रवर्ती विनती करते हुए कहा था, “साहब, अगर भागना होता तो वह गेट खोलकर भागती, खिड़की तोड़कर नहीं। आप पता लगाइए कहीं देर ना हो जाए।” इस तरह से नवरुणा केस की शुरुआत होती है।

अतुल्य के लिए उनकी बेटी ही सब कुछ थी, ऐसे में उनका मन नहीं मान रहा था और किसी अनहोनी की आशंका से दिल बैठा जा रहा था। नवरूणा के अपहरण की खबर हर जगह फैल गई। धीरे-धीरे टाउन डीएसपी, थानाध्यक्ष, आई.ओ. अधिकारी दल-बल के साथ पहुंचते हैं और जांच की प्रक्रिया आगे बढ़ाई जाती है। अपहरण की प्राथमिकी दर्ज कर दी जाती है और अनुसंधान की जिम्मेदारी इंस्पेक्टर अमित कुमार को सौंपी दी जाती है। पूछताछ होने पर कोई नतीजा सामने नहीं आने के कारण नवरूणा के माता-पिता आत्मदाह की चेतावनी देते हैं। इस बात को देखते हुए 22 अक्टूबर को डीआईजी के आदेश पर नवरूणा की बरामदगी के लिए विशेष टीम तैयार की जाती है।

26 नवंबर 2012 को नवरूणा के घर के सामने बने नाले की उड़ाही की जाती है, जिसमें से एक कंकाल बरामद किया जाता है। लोगों द्वारा यह आशंका जताई जाती है कि कंकाल नवरूणा का हो सकता है। उस वक्त कई तरह के सवाल उठने शुरू हो जाते हैं, जैसे- इस नर कंकाल से कोई दुर्गंध क्यों नहीं आई? हालांकि यह सवाल बिल्कुल लाज़िमी है कि लाश की दुर्गंध क्यों नहीं फैली? इसका जवाब आता है कि हो सकता है मृतक के शरीर को केमिकल ट्रीटमेंट करके फेंका गया हो। जांच की प्रक्रिया आगे बढ़ने के बाद उस लाश के एबालमिंग की बात सामने आती है। खैर, नर कंकाल मिलने के बाद उसकी पहचान तक नहीं हो सकती है कि वह लड़के की है या लड़की की। इसी बीच अतुल्य और मैत्री से डीएनए जांच की बात कही गई पर उन्होंने मना कर दिया। इस बीच नवरूणा की बरामदगी को लेकर विरोध-प्रदर्शन होने लगे। हर तरफ लोग नवरूणा के लिए आवाज़ उठाने लगे क्योंकि सभी नागरिकों नवरूणा की खबर चाहिए थी।

तारीखों का सिलसिला

एक ओर अगर किसी बच्चे का अपहरण हो जाए, तब अन्य मां-बाप और उन के मन में भी डर के भाव आ जाते हैं कि कहीं उनके साथ भी ऐसी घटना ना हो जाए। कुछ लड़कियों से मैंने नवरूणा केस को लेकर बात भी की और बातचीत में उन्होंने बताया कि नवरूणा केस के बाद उनमें डर का साया घर कर गया था क्योंकि इस केस के बाद लड़कियां घर में भी सुरक्षित महसूस नहीं करती थी। खुली खिड़की से डर हो गया था क्योंकि नवरूणा का अपहरण खिड़की के रोड को तोड़कर ही कर दिया था। 30 अक्टूबर 2012 को दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय के छात्र अभिषेक द्वारा राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग से नवरूणा कांड में पहल करने की गुहार लगाई जाती है और दिसंबर के पहले हफ्ते में सुप्रीम कोर्ट में याचिका दायर कर दी जाती है।

7 जनवरी 2013 को सुप्रीम कोर्ट में याचिका स्वीकार होने के बाद 25 फरवरी को सुनवाई की तारीख तय करके राज्य सरकार और डीजीपी को हाज़िर होने के लिए नोटिस भेजा दिया जाता है।

सुनवाई की तारीख नज़दीक आते-आते तारीख फिर बढ़ा कर दो महीने बाद निर्धारित कर दी जाती है मगर सुनवाई नहीं होने के कारण तारीख को बढ़ाकर फिर 1 जुलाई तय कर दी जाती है, जिससे परेशान होकर अतुल्य चक्रवर्ती द्वारा अर्जेसी लगाई जाती है और सुनवाई 7 मई 2013 को होती है। जहां राज्य सरकार के वकील द्वारा फॉरेंसिक रिपोर्ट की मौखिक जानकारी दी जाती है। यहां भी फॉरेंसिक रिपोर्ट अधूरी होने के कारण जस्टिस लोढ़ा डीएनए जांच की बात पर आपत्ति जताते हैं। हालांकि 25 मार्च 2014 को मुज़फ्फरपुर के एसकेएमसीएच में नवरूणा के माता-पिता अपना ब्लड सैंपल देते हैं।

बाद में पता चलता है कि यह लाश नवरूणा की ही है, और केस अपहरण से मर्डर मिस्ट्री में तब्दील हो जाता है। इसके बाद शुरू होता है तारीखों का सिलसिला और तब खुलती है सुशासन बाबू की नींद। 18 सितंबर 2013 को नवरूणा मामले की जांच के लिए सीबीआई जांच की अनुशंसा कर दी जाती है, मगर सीबीआई द्वारा मुख्यमंली की सिफारिश को नज़रअंदाज़ कर दिया जाता है। 25 नवंबर को सुप्रीम कोर्ट की सुनवाई में इस मामले को सीबीआई को सौंप दिया जाता है, जिससे नवरूणा के माता-पिता को तसल्ली मिलती है कि अब उन्हें न्याय ज़रूर मिलेगा। सुप्रीम कोर्ट के आदेश के करीब 3 महीने बाद सीबीआई ने 14 फरवरी 2014 को एफआईआर दर्ज होती है। 18 फरवरी 2014 को सीबीआई की टीम पूछताछ के लिए निकलती है। सीबीआई की टीम ने घंटों नवरूणा के माता-पिता से पूछताछ की, जिसमें यह बात सामने आती है कि 8 कट्टा ज़मीन के लिए 12 साल की नवरूणा का अपहरण हुआ था।

इस दौरान केस राष्ट्रीय मानवाधिकार आयोग द्वारा राज्य मानवाधिकार आयोग को केस ट्रांसफर होता है, जो सीबीआई जांच शुरू होने के बाद स्थगित कर दिया जाता है। इस दौरान नवरूणा के माता-पिता पर भी अपनी बेटी को मारने और अपहरण करने के आरोप लगते हैं। एक ओर एक पिता अपनी बेटी के लिए लड़ रहा है और उसी पर आरोपों की बौछार हो जाती है। न्याय की गुहार मांगने के लिए मजबूत इच्छाशक्ति की जरूरत होती है क्योंकि न्याय तारीखों में पिसता है। कुछ ऐसा ही हुआ अतुल्य और मैत्री के साथ क्योंकि सीबीआई ने तारीखों का ऐसा जाल बुना कि नवरूणा केस तारीखों में ही घुट गया। लेकिन नवरूणा के न्याय के लिए गंभीरता नहीं दिखाई। कभी 6 महीने का वक्त मांगा गया तो कभी 4 महीने का वक्त, नवरूणा केस में सिमटती चली गई और माता-पिता न्याय की आस में बूढ़े। अब साल 2012

से 2020 आ गया मगर नवरुणा की गुत्थी नहीं सुलझ सकी। आठ सालों तक सीबीआई केवल कयास में जीती रही मगर नवरुणा के साथ क्या हुआ, उसकी कोई खबर नहीं ला सकी। 27 अक्टूबर को सुप्रीम कोर्ट में इस मामले की अंतिम सुनवाई हुई थी, जहां सीबीआई द्वारा सुप्रीम कोर्ट से जांच में और समय देने की मांग हुई थी। कोर्ट ने सीबीआई को अंतिम रूप से 2 महीने का समय जांच के लिए दिया था, जो 27 दिसंबर को पूरी होने वाली है।

इस बार सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने सीबीआई को स्पष्ट रूप से कहा था कि इस अंतिम तारीख में वह चार्जशीट भी फाइल करे लेकिन उससे पहले ही सीबीआई ने मुज़फ्फरपुर की विशेष सीबीआई अदालत में अपनी फाइनल रिपोर्ट समर्पित कर दी है। 40 पन्नों की रिपोर्ट में केस के क्लोज़र की बात सामने आई है। नवरुणा के माता-पिता सीबीआई जांच से नाखुश हैं क्योंकि उन्हें अपनी बेटी की जानकारी तक नहीं मिली, जिस कंकाल के मिलने की बात सामने आई थी, जांच में पता चला था कि वह नवरुणा के ही अवशेष हैं मगर सीबीआई ने नवरुणा के अवशेषों तक को उसके माता-पिता को नहीं सौंपा है। अपनी बेटी के अपहरण की गुत्थी सुलझाते-सुलझाते वे अवशेष मांगने की स्थिति में आ गए मगर केस नहीं सुलझ सका। नवरुणा के माता-पिता के दर्द को केवल वही समझ सकता है, जिसने अपने बच्चों को खोया हो, मगर देश की शीर्ष जांच एजेंसी के रवैये ने उम्मीद की किरण को अंधियारे में लपेट दिया है। नवरुणा की बंद सांसे और माता-पिता की आंखें प्रशासन समेत पूरे देश से सवाल कर रही हैं, मगर जवाब किसी के पास नहीं है।



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BURNS AND BIAS

Puja Awasthi

18 January 2020, The Week

Though more women have been victims of acid attacks, men, too, have bore the brunt of the hate crime. The last visual memory that Shahnawaz (uses just one name) has is of watching Shaktimaan—the Hindi serial about a superhero. He was five then. That night, as Shahnawaz lay asleep next to his mother, he sensed a searing heat on his face. “It felt as though someone had flung hot tea on me,” he recalls. “Then, a thousand electric currents began racing across my face. When I covered my face, my hands felt the same heat and then pain.”

Shahnawaz’s face had been bathed in acid. His alleged attacker, Kayyum, was a tenant of his father, Said Ahmed. The two had fallen out as Ahmed had asked Kayyum to vacate the house. Ahmed’s eldest daughter was to be married and the family needed money, for which they wanted to sell the house. On the night of the attack in August 1997, Ahmed, a cement supplier, was not at their home in Meerut. Well aware of the layout of the house—which has a courtyard with a gate that leads to the road outside—Kayyum, an electrician, had snapped the electricity connection and pocketed the keys to the courtyard gate. To reach the house, he had hopped over a row of connected terraces in the densely packed locality of Zaidi Farm. He waited on the roof till the night grew darker. When he jumped from the roof onto the courtyard, his mask slipped. Shahnawaz’s elder sister, who looked out on hearing the thud, saw him in the moonlight. Before she could cry out, he flung the liquid on Shahnawaz’s face and fled with the gate keys.

It was easy to identify where Shahnawaz slept—he was the only child on the cot; his four sisters had their bedding laid down on the floor. “Attacking me was his way to render my father useless,” says Shahnawaz. “Daughters get married and have other responsibilities. I was the only one who would have grown up to take care of my parents.”

Two hours passed before Shahnawaz was taken to the hospital. Though the family’s cries had brought the neighbours to their doorstep, no one could get in because the gate was locked. The only other way was to climb an electric pole and scale the courtyard wall. Neither the neighbours nor

the family inside had the presence of mind to break open the gate. It was Ahmed who, upon his return from Delhi, climbed the pole.

“He wrapped me in a thick blanket and took me to the nearest doctor,” recalls Shahnawaz. By then Shahnawaz’s mouth was full of blisters and though he desperately wanted to ask his father for reassurance, no words would come out. “That is what frightened me the most—that I would never be able to speak to my father,” he says. Later, the police found a glass bottle of acid, half empty, in a drain outside their home and a pair of slippers on the roof. “They [slippers] had been bought by my father for Kayyum,” says Shahnawaz. “My father thought of him as a son.” Kayyum was subsequently arrested and jailed. Shahnawaz’s family, meanwhile, ran from Meerut to Hapur (in the National Capital Region) and then to Delhi for treatment. Months later, they would come to know that Kayyum had been granted bail. He has been absconding since.

Shahnawaz is part of the larger untold story of acid attack survivors in India. He is a man. His attacker was not, as per common understanding, a rejected or disgruntled lover. He was the victim of a hate crime, which, though claims more female victims, does not spare males.

In November 2016, Aslam Khan, 32, a native of Hapur and an e-rickshaw driver, was hired by three men to drop them off at a temple on the road that led from Hapur to Delhi. The men, however, kept asking him to go further from the destination, leading him to a deserted patch on the road. “One of them whipped out a knife and slashed my neck. Another flung acid on my face,” he says. “They took away my wallet and fled with my e-rickshaw. I had my mobile and pressed the last dialled number (that) of a friend. I gave him my location and pleaded that he come and save me.” The attack left Aslam blind. Though his attackers were arrested, he is yet to receive any compensation despite having completed the requisite paperwork. His greatest worry is over the future of his three children, the youngest of whom is four. Tradition does not permit him to allow his wife, Reshma, to step out to work. Earlier, the family had a sewing machine on which Reshma worked on and off. It has since been sold off to fund Aslam’s frequent visits to Chennai for treatment at the Sankara Nethralaya.

Another dominant thread in the narrative of acid survivors is that it is a crime committed only by men. So, on October 24, 2019, when a report

was sought to be lodged against Muskaan Hilal, 19—who had flung acid on Faizad Zafar, 20—at the Quarsi police station in Aligarh, sub-inspector Lakhmi Singh was stumped. “This is the first time I have come across such an incident,” says Singh, the investigating officer in the case. “The girl confessed that she had flung acid as the boy was refusing to marry her. Medical investigation has confirmed that the liquid used was acid—the kind that is used to clean toilets. The boy has lost vision in one eye”, he said.

Three and a half years ago, when acid was poured on Meerut-based Umerdaraj’s neck; it was a woman who lured him to the site of the attack. He had a tiff with the local goon Irfan and his wife Rizwana had been calling Umerdaraj repeatedly to end the feud. “That day, too, it was she who called me for a meeting,” says Umerdaraj, 37. “As we stood talking, two strangers threw acid on my neck. I turned around. Some of it fell on my chest. It felt as though my heart would stop beating.”

A father of four, he pulled his eldest child out of school in the aftermath of the attack, and took a loan of Rs1.5 lakh to undergo three surgeries. He needs more surgeries, but cannot afford them, he says. The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) offered him Rs 1 lakh as compensation. Though an FIR was filed against Irfan, Rizwana and two unknown persons, only Irfan was arrested. The police were unable to find Rizwana. Umerdaraj, meanwhile, keeps his neck covered and avoids going out as his neighbours call him ‘Jalawa’ (the burnt one) to his face.

In July 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that acid attack victims shall be paid a compensation of at least Rs 3 lakh by the state government/Union territory towards after care and rehabilitation. Any victim compensation schemes in existence then or brought into effect post the ruling would have to comply with the said order. This was to be in addition to any fines to be paid under Section 326A (a section added to the Indian Penal Code in 2013, along with Section 326B to recognise, define and penalise acid attacks and attempts to attack with acid). None of these are gender-specific. But within the government and judicial apparatus, these are presumed to apply only to female victims.

In 2014, Chandrahass Mishra (36), who had been attacked by acid in 2011, approached the DLSA in Meerut to claim compensation. He was told that there was no provision for male survivors. “This does not happen

to men, they told me,” says Mishra. The attacker was his landlord’s son, Akshay Khanna, who was miffed over Mishra’s constant objection to his indecent comments and actions towards women. Mishra had gone as far as threatening his attacker with a police complaint if he did not stop. “In school, I was part of the Scouts and Guide team. I have a sister and female cousins,” says Mishra. “It was only natural to object to indecent behaviour.” The acid that had landed on the right side of Mishra’s face had scalded his scalp and ear before trickling down to his chest and arm. The medical measure of his burns was less than 40 per cent, and so he was not eligible for a disability certificate. After multiple surgeries and postoperative care burnt through his savings, he started his struggle for compensation. The police were clueless about it, as were the district magistrate’s office and the office of the chief medical officer. Mishra’s persistence with the DLSA got him Rs 1 lakh under a generic compensation scheme applicable to victims of acid attack, rape, human trafficking and murder. His initial reaction was to reject it, but then he accepted it.

Mishra’s case is one of the 12, a Delhi based lawyer Anuja Kapur has used to start a public interest litigation which, among other prayers, calls upon the Supreme Court to consider that “present laws involving acid attack are women-centric and gender-biased in nature”. The broader plea of the PIL, titled Anuja Kapur vs Union of India and others, is to call upon state and Union territories to file their responses on what has been done on ground since acid attacks were recognised as a specific and separate form of crime. It thus asks for directions to be issued for maintenance of records related to “jobs and education, compensation, medical facilities and legal aid and services, provided to the victim of acid attack at the Central and state level”. It also calls for termination of licenses of shopkeepers for illegal over-the-counter sale of acid.

Kapur, an advocate practising in the Supreme Court, says that till date, of the 42 respondents named in the PIL, only 28 have filed counter affidavits. Among those yet to respond are the ministry of health and family welfare and the state of Uttar Pradesh, which recorded the highest number of acid attacks as per the latest data released by the National Crime Records Bureau. “The law is handicapped as it is not serving its purpose,” says Kapur. On the last hearing of the PIL on August 5, 2019, the court directed the respondents to file responses within four weeks, failing which they would be liable to a penalty of Rs 50,000. The

next hearing is on January 24. Meanwhile, Shahnawaz, who has never sought compensation, has a disability certificate that reads “He has got 100 per cent disability”. He has no vision in his left eye. The right one has some. The skin on his neck folds and crumbles, so it appears that his neck is fused to his face. He has difficulty moving his head. But he does not want his story to be one of pity or defeat. He has a hand-operated plastic moulding machine through which he makes a living. “I am very good at my work,” he says. “Tell me of a plastic part used anywhere, say, in a car, and I will make it for you. All I need is financial assistance to get an automatic machine that does a neater and quicker job.”

He clearly needs no superheroes to mould his future.



Puja Awasthi presently working as Senior Special Correspondent, The Week, has spent the last two decades reporting on politics and social justice from North India. She is a recipient of various prestigious fellowships and awards in recognition of her work, being the first recipient of the Omidyar Network’s Land Rights Fellowship in India as a noteworthy achievement.

ALIGARH HOSPITAL MLC REPORT ON HATHRAS VICTIM SHATTERS UP POLICE'S 'NO RAPE' CLAIM

Ismat Ara

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Official document notes use of force against woman, notes the detail she provided of penetration by penis. Curiously, the sexual assault forensic exam was only conducted on September 22, eight days after she was admitted and examined.



New Delhi: Contrary to the Uttar Pradesh Police claim that the Dalit teenager at Hathras who succumbed to her grievous injuries on September 29 was not raped, the medico-legal examination report (MLC) prepared by the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital (JNMCH) at Aligarh, where she was first admitted, reveals that doctors had recorded the detail provided by her of the “complete penetration of the vagina” and indicated the use of force in their preliminary examination.

In line with the Union health ministry’s protocol for medical examination of victims of sexual assault which stipulates that examining doctors “should neither refute nor confirm” whether a sexual offence had occurred, the hospital reserved its opinion on whether the assault on the victim involved

rape or not, and referred the case for further examination by the state government-run Forensic Science Laboratory in Agra.

The medical examiner Dr. Faiz Ahmed, assistant professor at the JNMCH, concluded, “On the basis of local examination, I am of the opinion that there are signs of use of force. However, opinion regarding penetrative intercourse is reserved pending availability of FSL reports.”

The 54 page JNMCH report, which The Wire has accessed, recorded various details of the crime that the 19-year-old woman who died after battling for life for two weeks, provided, including “penetration by penis” and that she was “strangled by her dupatta”. It also found “quadripareisis” – a condition characterised by weakness in all four limbs (both arms and both legs) – and “paraplegia” in the woman’s body that caused “sensory loss” in lower limbs up to the level of her hips.

Key pages from the MLC report on the Hathras rape victim, produced by the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital at Aligarh.

The report claims that the victim, who was admitted to the hospital on September 14, informed the doctors about her sexual assault only on September 22. On the same day, the JNMCH referred the case to FSL, Agra. “As alleged by the informant, the survivor was sexually assaulted by four known persons of the same village when she was doing some work in the fields of the village Bulgarhi on 14/09/2020 at 9.00 a.m. There is a history of loss of consciousness during the incident,” the MLC said.

The subsequent FSL report, for which samples were collected from the JNMCH only on September 25 – that is three days after JNMCH referred the case to FSL and 11 days after she was first examined – has become the basis for UP police officials to deny the possibility of rape in the case. On Thursday, Prashant Kumar, additional director general (law and order) of Uttar Pradesh police, cited the absence of sperm in samples that the FSL collected as proof that the victim was not raped and the matter was “twisted to stir caste tension.”

Speaking to The Wire on Friday, Kumar, however, indicated that he knew of the presence of the JNMCH report when he had made this claim. Inexplicable delay in sexual assault forensic examination Curiously,

the MLC report, which begins with an account of the hospital's first examination of the woman at 4:10 pm on September 14, describes the 'present illness' of the woman as merely 'strangulation' and records the claim that the assailant was unknown.

Given the fact that she had already stated on video that she had been raped and had named her attackers, the omission of this incident in the initial MLC raises doubts about the efforts put in by the policemen who brought her there and the hospital authorities examining the grievously injured woman to establish the full picture.

Ironically, these videos have been circulated by BJP leaders on Twitter in order to suggest the woman was not raped, whereas she clearly speaks about 'zabardasti', or force, being done – a well-known euphemism for rape – and also names some of the attackers. These videos were apparently shot by unidentified persons in the Chandpa police station before she was taken to the Aligarh hospital. The MLC report includes a note dated September 22 from Prof M.F. Huda, chairman, department of neurosurgery at the hospital in which he says 'Patient is critical so kindly arrange a magistrate dying declaration'. The magistrate recorded her declaration that day in which she described the rape and, coincidentally, the hospital finally conducted its sexual assault forensic examination on September 22 too – claiming, "Patient didn't gave [sic] any history of sexual assault at the time of admission to the hospital. She told about the incident [sic] for the first time on Sept 22". Details of the MLC In section 16 of the MLC performed by the JNMCH, the doctors record that the victim's vagina had been penetrated by a penis during the incident. In the next column, the doctors said that the penetration was "complete".

The other subsections which seek to know whether there was 'emission of semen', 'did the assailant use condom', and 'status of condom,' have been marked 'DNK', an acronym for 'do not know'. Against the subsection which seeks to record whether there was use of any weapons during the assault, the doctors have written, 'no' but added that the 'the survivor was gagged'. The document also mentions that the victim was given a threat of murder during the incident. The JNMCH had performed the initial medical examination on her, in order to file a medico-legal case (MLC) report. This MLC report also mentions the names of the four accused persons, all members of the Thakur community, whose names were disclosed to the hospital by the victim's family.

UP Police's contention The Aligarh hospital record furthers the claim made by journalists, activists and opposition parties that the Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has been attempting to downplay the gravity of the crime. After the woman's body was cremated without her family's consent by district police, reports have shown that the administration has attempted to intimidate the victim's family and prevent media and political leaders from entering Boolgarhi, her village in Hathras. ADG Kumar had discounted rape on two counts. One, that the FSL report has said that "no sperm or ova were found in the samples collected from vaginal swab". And two, the post mortem report has suggested that the cause of death of the deceased was because of trauma following injury in the neck. "The post-mortem report says the victim died due to her neck injury. The FSL report hasn't found sperm in samples, making it clear that some people twisted the matter to stir caste-based tension. Such people will be identified and legal action will be taken," Kumar said.

With the JNMCH report leaning towards the possibility of rape, it is not clear why the UP police is insisting there was no rape. Speaking to The Wire, a JNMCH official said, "This (MLC) is the final report we prepared after the examination of the victim. This is the same document that will also be presented in court." The MLC was examined and attested by the CMO (Chief Medical Officer) of the hospital, Dr. Obaid Imtiyazul Haque.

The report also clearly shows the Hathras superintendent of police Vikrant Vir was being economical with the truth when he told the news agency ANI earlier that the report by the Aligarh hospital, where she was admitted before she was brought to Safdarjung hospital does not confirm rape. "The medical report from the Aligarh Muslim University Medical College (JNMCH) mentions that there were injuries but it does not confirm forced sexual intercourse. They are waiting for a forensics report. As of now, doctors say that they're not confirming rape," he had said. The report could more accurately be characterized as neither confirming nor denying rape but Vir chose to play it one way. Indeed, under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare guidelines and protocols for medico-legal care of survivors/victims of sexual violence, "The examining doctor should clarify in the court that normal examination findings neither refute nor confirm whether the sexual offence occurred or not. They must ensure that a medical opinion cannot be given on whether 'rape' occurred because 'rape' is a legal term." 'FSL considered sperm collected 11 days after crime'.

The forensic report, according to reports, had not found any traces of sperm. Doctors from JNMCH have told The Wire that the sample for the FSL (Forensic Science Laboratory) report which has been cited by the ADG, was collected as late as September 25, 11 days after the incident. It is, therefore, unreliable, they said. "There are no chances of finding sperm, as its life cycle is hardly 2-3 days. If a sample is collected within 72 hours, that too with the condition that the girl has not used the bathroom to relieve herself or hasn't taken a bath...only then it will be valid," Hamza Malik, junior resident doctor, at the JNMCH hospital said. He added that it is not necessary for ejaculation to have occurred for the offence to be considered rape.

Dr. Asrar-ul-Haque, assistant professor at the forensics department of AMU hospital, confirmed the same to The Wire. "Given the fact that the life cycle of a sperm is not more than 3 days, it is highly improbable that it would be found in the FSL report." He also said that in order to probe rape, all the swabs should be taken. Although the JNMCH officials collected the vaginal swabs only on September 22 – the date the hospital claims the victim informed them about her sexual assault – the doctors pointed out qualitative concerns about those samples. Apart from the delay in collecting swabs, the MLC mentioned that the woman had washed herself before reporting to the hospital, and that she changed clothes, wore cleaned or washed clothes, and also changed her underwear at the time of admission.

The Wire has been able to confirm that the samples for the FSL report were indeed collected on September 25. In any case, say lawyers, the police's statement concerning the requirements of presence of sperm to prove rape is patently erroneous and contrary to settled law, which considers even the slightest of non-consensual penetration as an act of rape. The victim's post mortem report, which the ADG Kumar referred to, was made at Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi, where she was shifted on September 28 – 14 days after the incident. The report did not specify if rape had occurred. However, it says that there were multiple old, healed tears in the victim's hymen. The uterus contained blood clots and the anal orifice showed old, healed tear. It also mentions that blood was present in the vagina, calling it 'menstrual blood'. The victim's mother had initially alleged that the bleeding had occurred due to the rape. The report also held that the spinal injury sustained by the victim was the cause of her paralysis and ultimately, death.

When The Wire reached out to the ADG (law and order) Prashant Kumar, he said he had only stated a fact about the FSL report but was not exonerating the accused. "I only stated a fact about the FSL report: that sperm was not found. I insisted that the investigation is still ongoing, who are we to give a clean chit to anybody," he told The Wire, adding that the media reports had cherry-picked his statements to create a false narrative. In fact, an official note of the UP Police formally circulated to the media on October 1 says categorically, "Putting to rest all the speculation, the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) report on the vaginal sample of the 19-year-old girl of Hathras has revealed that she was not raped."

On being asked about the JNMCH report, ADG Kumar appeared to underline the significance of the FSL report over the initial MLC. "The AMU report has been formed on the basis of local examination. AMU hospital is a semi-autonomous body," he said. Curiously, however, he did not mention the JNMCH medical report at this press briefing, and chose to only speak on the FSL and post mortem reports while discounting the possibility of rape in the Hathras assault case. He went on to say, "Some people are projecting this as a case of mass rape even though the victim's brother himself gave us in writing that there was only one person involved. We believed the victim's version from the very beginning and also arrested the accused immediately. We have nothing to hide and we know the definition of rape."

Legal experts well-versed in cases of sexual violence said, that the victim's claim that she was sexually assaulted would hold greater significance over laboratory tests which were possibly done on contaminated samples.

Senior advocate Rebecca John says that an FSL report is not the legal requirement to constitute rape and is hence irrelevant. She says, "In the facts and circumstances of this case, the FSL report is largely irrelevant. Collecting a vaginal swab after 8 days (at the JNMCH) – after she has urinated, washed her vagina, where is the question of any semen to be found? It was an irrelevant exercise that was conducted." She also believed that "given the circumstances, the FSL report can be corroborative, not substantial." She said that contrary to what the UP police has claimed, the FSL report cannot be used to discount the possibility of rape. "You cannot rule out rape by the FSL report, but you can affirmatively confirm rape in case the FSL finds something. The provisional opinion is not ruling

out rape,” she said. She added that the MLC in its conclusion clearly mentions the use of force, which is a reference to sexual assault. “The effort on part of the police authorities has been to establish that there was no rape. Whereas the effort should have been to establish the opposite. Far from the UP police’s version of the AMU hospital report that it has ruled out rape, it is leaning towards it,” she told The Wire. “The Supreme Court has been consistent on the fact that the victim’s statement is of sterling quality. That’s the only test you have to pass,” the senior advocate added.

Vrinda Grover, a lawyer in Delhi, has also raised concerns over the swabs for the FSL report being collected almost two weeks after the incident. “Why were the vaginal swabs taken only on 22 September? There was a young woman who was found lying without her clothes, in a mutilated condition. The first response should have been to collect all possible samples. This is a dereliction of duty at all levels.”



Ismat Ara, a reporter with The Wire, works mostly on gender, communalism, human rights, child rights and education. Her work has also appeared in The Hindu, Newslandry, Oxfam India, News18.com, Firstpost, HuffPost India, The Quint and the BBC.

METROPOLITAN FISHERWOMEN : STORY OF KASIMEDU WOMEN

Nandhini.V

8 March 2020, hindutamil.in

The fisherwomen of Kasimedu lay wide awake while Chennai city sleeps. Their work starts at 1.00 a.m. The auction begins at 1 a.m. and ends around 3 or 4 a.m. on weekdays extending to nearly 6 a.m. on the weekends.

Men are responsible for procuring fish from the sea. However, the business on the shore is run by women. The women procure fish, prawns, and crabs and sell them in the harbour. These women selling the fish belong to Kuppam and Naguranthottam, around the Kasimedu – Thiruvottriyur stretch. The lifestyle and livelihood of these fishermen involve fish and its allies, which drives the life of the modern 'Neythal' land of Tamil metropolitan.

One evening in the Kasimedu harbour, I met a few women who sell fish. It is easy to identify them with their restless faces, salty blackened skin, carelessly tied sarees. Yet, contrary to their clothing, they smile despite the numerous problems they face.

“My mom sold fish here. I grew up watching my mom selling fish from the age of 12. I am now doing the same job after her death. I have been selling fish for the past 20 years. I wake up at 1 a.m., if I sleep at around 8 p.m., to get good quality fish. Any slight delay will lower my chance of getting fresh quality fish”, says Kanchana (44). She belongs to the area and has studied just till the 2nd standard. Her husband sells water cans to the boats, while Kanchana sells fish to save the family from poverty.

The business in Kasimedu goes on till noon on Sundays and gets over by 9 to 10 a.m. on other days. “I earn around Rs. 500 to 1000 per day. My sister helps me, and I take care of her tea and food. That’s how we manage while taking care of each other,” says Kanchana. Dhatchayini (39), Kanchana’s sister, cleans the fish bought at the auction. “Earning Rs.100 a day, doing this, is a big task,” says Dhatchayini, her hands littered with scratches from knives and sickles used to clean the fish.

"My husband died vomiting blood due to his ganja addiction. I have two sons and one daughter. The daughter is married but her husband is in jail for a theft case. She has three kids and I am taking care of them as well," says Dhatchayini.

They earn Rs.100 to 150 for cleaning one basket of fish. The payment, however, varies on the type and size of the fish. They are paid Rs.40 for prawns and Rs.30 for lobsters. Few of them settle to pay only Rs.20 after a hard bargain. "They give the procured fish for cleaning to the cleaners who are close to them. We have to pay Rs.30 for the water that is required to clean the fishes, and I have to pay Rs. 1200 from this paltry sum for my house rent," frowns Datchayini.

Through their conversation, one could understand that most of their husbands have died of alcohol addiction. Some of them are living alone due to various incorrigible differences. The sea is their only family and livelihood.

"Alcohol addiction took away my husband's life. After his demise, I've been surviving by cleaning fish for the past year. We're helpless. We can't control their drinking even if we try to. They say that alcohol soothes their body pain after riding in the seas for long periods," says Muthulakshmi. "My alcohol-addicted husband died four years ago, suffering a heart attack. I had a grown-up son and a seven-month-old daughter at the time of his death. Now I am selling fish and helping my sister, says the 40-year-old Kalvi. Her sister's name is Desam, whom she also supports. While chatting, they mention, smiling, that Desam and Desarani are the names of their family deities.

Kalvi has studied till the fifth standard. "She flunked in studies despite being named Kalvi", all the women there, including Kalvi, had a hearty laugh when Desam trolls Kalvi's name. "My husband also went to the seas. He died due to alcohol addiction as well. My son who had to step in his father's shoes wanted to study further but I had to let him leave his studies and work for the family to sustain. My husband used to give Rs. 500 a day till he was alive. After his demise, I have to take care of everything," says Kalvi.

Desam helped Kalvi set up by sharing her knowledge of the fish business. "We have to touch and feel the fish find out its health. If it is pulpy, it is

terrible. If it is sturdy and robust, it is good.” Her confidence is evident from her twenty-year experience in the field.

Her 23-year-old son, who has studied till 2nd standard, also died of a heart attack in an inebriated state.”The Seer fish goes for Rs.600 per kg. One can earn from Rs.500 to Rs.5000 per day. One day it will be a major profit, and the next day you will incur a loss. It is like gambling. Return on your investment is uncertain. If everything works out, it will be a profit. Else it will be a loss. I have incurred a loss of up to Rs. 5000 in a day,” says Desam. “My husband goes to the sea. He splurges his day’s earning into drinking. My mom and grandmother also used to auction fishes in this area, but now they are no more,” says Desam, whose sad words reflect the sorrow of most fisherwomen.

The men’s death due to alcohol addiction and their refusal to give money to run their family pushes these women towards marginalisation. Sleep and rest have been a long-lost dream for these women. After finishing their business in the afternoon, they go back to take care of the household chores. When Desam says, “If I went to sleep in the evening, I would be asleep by night, and my husband will not like it if I don’t give him time and not talking to him at all,” all the other women in the group share a hearty laugh forgetting their sorrows. Desam’s swollen legs are just a part of these women’s health issues. Sitting for very long hours result in severe neck and back pain without adequate sleep or rest. “My husband is not working since he is unwell, so I am cleaning the fish. One can earn up to Rs.500 on Sundays and Rs.200 to 300 on other days. My hips get stiff as I have to sit for more than three hours,” says Janaka.

I spoke to Devi (41), who procures the fish in Kasimedu and sells it on the streets of Thiruvottiyur, 12 KM away from Kasimedu. “My husband has died. I have two daughters and one son. I somehow learned to sell fish. I have frequent headaches from carrying the basket of fish on my head. Popping a tablet might help for the time being. It would be good if the government provided a goods cycle or rickshaw. I already suffer from a wheezing cough problem. It will be cold during the winters, and when I put my hand in cold water, I fall sick. I have borrowed Rs.20000 on interest, for which I pay Rs. 300 daily as interest.”

The primary issue that these women face is debt. Due to lack of income, they borrow money and pay it back at a very high-interest rate.

“There is work only if the fish arrives; otherwise, we have to sit here all day and leave empty-handed. We get Rs.60 a day but sometimes even that isn’t possible. My husband drowns himself in alcohol. He asks for my hard-earned money to get an extra ‘peg’. We eat only on my earnings since he doesn’t shed his share. I have two sons, who paid for their own weddings I have a debt of Rs. 20,000 and I pay interest on that.” says 51-year-old Desarani, who cleans the fish. “Have to pay Rs.1500 speed interest for Rs. 10,000,” Dhatchayini tells her story.

During the fishing ban, women in this locality were in debt as the Rs.5000 government subsidy was not enough. Moreover, there is a lack of basic amenities like toilets, water and stands to clean the fish. “Earlier, the men wouldn’t sell fish. Now they are also selling fish without going to the sea. This is not good for us,” says Desam. However, they don’t complain about the sea and fish that helps them sustain their livelihood despite their troubles.

“We have never wondered why we were born to be fisherwomen. On the contrary, we are delighted in our hearts,” declares Desam. Kalvi agrees, stating that “The sea has given us our livelihood from the times of our father and grandfather. We cannot curse the sea even in our dreams”.

Ms Velvizhi, the chief scientist of the M.S.Swaminathan Fish Research and Training Centre, spoke about the exploitation of the fisherwoman and the steps needed to be taken by the government to uplift their life. “Fishing stands second among the most dangerous jobs in the world. Usually, men stay out in the sea for nearly 10- 15 days to catch the fish. They start drinking at first to overcome the tiredness and become addicted to alcohol over time. The people most affected due to this is the fisherwomen. One can say there will be no fishing if there is no fisherwoman. Even though the men go deep into the sea for fishing, the women take care of their needs to prepare them to clean, auction and sell.

In places like Rameswaram, the women directly catch the fish using a specialised net. The sea isn’t rough in the Gulf of Mannar because of which the women procure beads. The surge of corporatisation causes an increase in exporting quality fish. The remaining small and low-quality fish is left for the women. Due to this, even if there is foreign investment, the marginalised fisherwomen are pushed further away from the periphery.

Numerous issues arise in their homes due to the financial crisis. Society, in general, is still hesitant to allow fisherwomen with a basket on their heads to board a bus. The government must provide ID cards and three-wheelers to these women. By setting up selling stations, providing small loans, improving the infrastructure, and providing space for them to air out the dry fish, the government should provide regular training to the fisherwoman as well honour them with a professional life,” Says Velvizhi.

(Translated from Tamil to English)



Nandhini.V, Sub-Editor of the Hindu Tamil Thisai Digital Team, is a journalist committed to empowering oppressed people. In line with her commitment to highlighting issues faced by oppressed people, her video on the life of Kasimedu fisherwomen brings to the forefront the day-to-day challenges they face.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

घरेलू हिंसा पर कब लगेगा लॉकडाउन? आधी दुनिया, पूरी बात

तसनीम खान

9 जून 2020, पत्रिका.कॉम

- क्या महिलाओं के लिए सुरक्षित नहीं घर की दीवारें?
- देश में 33 फीसदी महिलाएं घरेलू हिंसा की शिकार
- शिकायत दर्ज करवाती हैं सिर्फ एक प्रतिशत महिलाएं

कोरोना की चपेट में इस वक्त दुनियाभर के देश हैं। इस दौरान विश्व का बड़ा हिस्सा लॉकडाउन के दौर से गुजर रहा है। मरीजों की बढ़ती संख्या के बीच एक तबका ऐसा भी है, जो इस दौरान भी हिंसा, मार, बदसलूकी और हैवानियत झेलता रहा। हम बात कर रहे हैं देश की आधी आबादी की। उन महिलाओं की जो इस महामारी के दौरान भी घरेलू हिंसा का सामना करती रहीं।

लॉकडाउन के दौरान की ही बात करें तो दुनियाभर में महिलाओं के प्रति घरेलू हिंसा में 20 प्रतिशत की बढ़ोतरी दर्ज की गई है। संयुक्त राष्ट्र के मुताबिक कोरोना महामारी के शुरू होने के बाद से लेबनान और मलेशिया में 'हेल्पलाइन' पर आने वाली फ़ोन कॉल की संख्या दोगुनी हो गई है जबकि चीन में यह संख्या तीन गुनी हुई है। वहीं भारत में घरेलू हिंसा के मामले दोगुने हुए।

यूएन ही नहीं राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग के आंकड़े भी यही कहते हैं। इसी दौरान नेशनल लीगल सर्विस अथोरिटी की ओर से 17 मई को देश के 28 राज्यों के आंकड़े जारी किए गए। इनके मुताबिक 24 मार्च से 15 मई के बीच अथोरिटी को जो शिकायतें मिली, उनमें सबसे ज्यादा उत्तराखंड से 144 शिकायतें मिली। 79 केस के साथ हरियाणा इस हिंसा को लेकर दूसरे स्थान पर रहा। तीसरे नंबर पर रही राजधानी दिल्ली, जहां से 69 महिलाओं की शिकायत मिली।

राज्यों में चल रहे वन स्टॉप क्राइसिस सेंटर ने भी अब आंकड़े जारी किए, जो चौंकाने वाले रहे। इन सेंटर से मिले डेटा के मुताबिक लॉकडाउन के दौरान आने वाले मामलों में 89 प्रतिशत मामले महिलाओं के घरेलू हिंसा से जुड़े हैं। इससे पहले राष्ट्रीय महिला आयोग ने जानकारी दी थी कि 23 मार्च से 16 अप्रैल यानी 24 दिनों में 587 महिलाओं की शिकायतें मिली।

अब यह मत कहना कि 24 दिनों में 587 मामले कोई बड़ी बात नहीं है। हो सकता है, इस पुरुष प्रधान देश में ये आंकड़े चौंकाने वाले नहीं हो।

लेकिन इस बात पर भी गौर करें.... कि नेशनल फैमिली हेल्थ सर्वे 2015-16 के मुताबिक देश की 33 प्रतिशत महिलाएं घरेलू हिंसा का शिकार होती हैं। यानी जितने प्रतिशत पर राजनीति में आरक्षण की मांग अरसे से महिलाएं कर रही हैं, उनकी उतने प्रतिशत आबादी तो अपने घर में हिंसा से ही जूझ रही है। इसी सर्वे में यह बताया गया कि इन 33 प्रतिशत में से मात्र एक फीसदी महिलाएं ही विरोध में आवाज उठा पाती हैं। यानी, इन आवाजों में जान फूंकने का काम सिस्टम अब तक नहीं कर पाया है।

आज हर राज्य में ऐसे कई हेल्पलाइन नंबर हैं, महिलाओं की मदद के लिए, लेकिन इन राज्यों से भी चिंताजनक आंकड़े सामने आ रहे हैं।

- यूपी में जारी 112 हेल्पलाइन नंबर पर 4 से 11 मई के बीच 9,831 मामले दर्ज किए गए हैं। हर दिन औसतन 1,228 केस यहां मिले हैं।

- बिहार महिला आयोग के मुताबिक राज्य में हर दिन 10 महिलाएं शिकायत दर्ज करवा रही हैं। कई महिलाओं को यहां रेस्क्यू करने की नौबत तक आ चुकी।

- पश्चिम बंगाल में चौथे चरण के लॉकडाउन तक 70 से ज्यादा महिलाओं ने महिला आयोग से मदद मांगी है।

- गुजरात में लॉकडाउन के 25 दिनों में ही 3525 शिकायतें दर्ज की गईं।

- ओडिशा पुलिस ने मामलों को बढ़ता देख फोन अप प्रोग्राम शुरू किया है।

- छत्तीसगढ़ में चुप्पी तोड़ मुहिम चलाई जा रही है।

- 28 मई से कई सामाजिक संगठनों ने ट्विटर पर इस हिंसा के खिलाफ ट्वीटोथॉन शुरू किया। इस हिंसा के प्रति सरकार का ध्यान दिलाने और आम लोगों से घरेलू हिंसा ना करने की अपील की जा रही है।

अब देखना सिर्फ यह है कि.. इन मामलों को कितनी गंभीरता से निपटाया जाता है।

इन हालातों में एक अच्छी खबर यह भी है कि...महाराष्ट्र के पुणे में इस घरेलू हिंसा से निपटने

के लिए एक नवाचार किया गया है। यहां जिला परिषद ने ग्रामीण स्तर पर कमेटियां बनाई हैं। इन्हें निर्देश दिया गया है कि घरेलू हिंसा की शिकायत मिलने पर पति को क्वारंटाइन में रखा जाए।

लेकिन - क्या यही एक इलाज होगा ?

क्योंकि, महामारी के बाद इनका क्वारंटाइन तो खत्म हो जाएगा, मगर घरेलू हिंसा की शिकार महिलाओं को राहत देने के लिए अभी पूरे सिस्टम यानी सरकार, कानून और समाज के स्तर पर नई नीतियों को लाने और कानून पर सख्ती से अमल करने की जरूरत है।



Tasneem Khan is a writer, reporter and storyteller for the past 16 years and is currently working with Palika TV. She is the scriptwriter and host of the TV show "Aadhi Duniya, Puri Baat".

AMCHI URMILA : ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Various Community Radio Stations in Maharashtra
28 October 2020

The episode titled “Ending Child Marriage” of the Marathi radio play, Amchi Urmila focused on saving young girls from yet another socio-economic impact of Covid-19, early child marriage. It tells the story of bright, brave Rupa who voices her anguish against her planned wedding. The story depicts the role of the community in being vigilant to prevent child marriage, and also in supporting families through their economic crisis. Taking a holistic approach and through sensitive story-telling, the creative team of Can Communicate and Centre for Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBC3) have highlighted the need for agency among girls and women in matters relating to their lives, the health impact of early child marriage, and ultimately appeal for girls’ ambitions and dreams to be realized. The radio play was used extensively by UNICEF by airing it on 22 community radio stations in Maharashtra in 2020.

(Translated from Marathi to English)



Amchi Urmila is a 10-episodic Marathi radio play conceptualised and created by Can Communicate, jointly with Centre for Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBC3) for UNICEF in Maharashtra.

WOMEN TRAFFICKING IN THE ANANTAPUR-KADAPA-CHITTOOR BELT

TV9Telugu

14 March 2020

Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh has been a drought-prone area for three decades. The farming sector is at stake as famine continues to destroy the area. Severely deficient rainfall has resulted in the drying up of fields and wells. Migration and trafficking remain at the top of the most devastating effects of the years of drought and agrarian crisis, especially across ten mandals in the Anantapur-Kadapa-Chittoor belt.

Local brokers prey on women and youngsters looking for ways to earn a living. Based on the data collected by the NGO REDS (Rural and Environment Development Society), between 2005 and 2011, 1,240 women were trafficked from this belt. Further, a survey by district officials in Anantapur in 2016 found that another whopping 6,200 women were susceptible to trafficking.

Women from Anantapur are taken to Gulf countries and other Indian states on the pretext of housework and then sexually exploited. In the Anantapur tribe, women are most vulnerable to trafficking. The primarily targeted group is Muslims, Dalits and women from Backward castes.

At Kalasamudram in Kadiri town, there's the poignant and distressing story of Mudin. "I was sold to a brothel house in Delhi and fed a single meal a day. I was forced to wear skimpy clothing and I wished to die as I could not bear men abusing my body one after the other. I wondered why women are made to go through such a hell." She had cigarette burns, cuts, and bruises on her hands and breasts. Housed in a single room combined with a bathroom, she said she was not even allowed to talk to the girl next door.

REDS NGO founder says that the authorities' approach to trafficking is lax, and they don't see it as a serious social issue. Even though some women are back home, it's not as though they have come back to the acceptance and affection of their families. The stigma and discrimination that began at home permeate the entire community.

While most of the women TV9 spoke to had made some effort to take legal action against their offenders, several families didn't even know that this was an option. Furthermore, REDS found that even the police are unaware of booking people under the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act of 1956.

The state does have laws in place to tackle human trafficking. Government orders set up district-level committees, anti-trafficking squads and shelter homes. Those rescued from trafficking are eligible for free healthcare services, including those who are HIV positive. Children and women survivors are also entitled to immediate relief of Rs 20,000.

Anantapur MP Gorantla Madhav, SP and Joint Collector, visited trafficking-prone Rayalaseema areas but didn't do much. It is high time the government takes the matter seriously and stops trafficking.

(Translated from Telugu to English)



TV9 Telugu is an Indian Telugu language channel primarily beamed in the state of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Rajinikanth Vellalacheruvu is the managing editor for TV9 Telugu. TV9 Network owned by Associated Broadcasting Company Private Limited.





BREAKING BARRIERS: WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

The Global Media Monitoring Project finds that women are more likely than men to be victims in news stories. Women are also far less likely than men to be featured in the world's news headlines and relied upon as 'spokespeople' or as 'experts'. Specific categories of women, such as the poor, older women, or those belonging to ethnic minorities, are even less visible. When adversity strikes and brings along its accompanying challenges, women face the same while carrying their gender-specific roles without a fair portrayal in the media. The stories in this section focus on identifying and addressing these various gender imbalances and gaps in the media. The women featured here are engaged in diverse occupations and have gone through different trajectories to succeed. Their motivations differ, with some responding to practical concerns and others following their passions, having one thing in common: an indomitable resolve to be counted as equal citizens.

Smashing stereotypes is the theme of the article titled, 'मदर्स ऑफ़ इण्डिया' पार्ट-4: बच्चे भूखे न सोएं इसलिए ये माँ बनाती है ट्रकों के पंचर', published in Gaon Connection's Special feature on the occasion of Women's Day. The article describes thirty-seven-year-old Tarannum's journey from poverty to fixing punctured tyres for a living. This brave mother took to the hammer and wrench to provide her children with education fixing bicycle to truck tyres and is well known in Lucknow. She defies all norms and lives life on her terms and conditions. Bhartesh Singh's article, 'Meet the 'agony aunts' of Haryana', describes the brave women who operate the women's helpline

addressing problems ranging from domestic abuse to stalking. At times these brave women have even provided marriage counselling to fighting couples. Run from a small room in a Police Station in Panchkula, the helpline has completed one year recently.

Education changes life. This proven fact is highlighted in Sikander Pareek's story, 'शिक्षित होकर खुद काबिल बनीं, अब फैला रही शिक्षा की नई रोशनी' struggle in rural areas to access education. He tells us the story of sisters Sita and Leela Garasiya from the tribal-dominated Koylavav village of Pali district. Through grit and determination, they translate 'where there is a will; there is a way' into reality. Leela, one of the sisters, is now a Headmistress in a government school where she promotes education for girls.

On the other hand, Nitasha Natu, in her story, 'Trafficked girls script success stories at Deonar shelter', tells us about the success stories from this shelter in Maharashtra. According to the National Crime Records Bureau 2018 data, Maharashtra led in the number of victims. The Deonar shelter home provides rescued girls a place to stay and educates them to help integrate them back into society. The shelter assists them in finishing their education, and provides them with skill training. These rescued girls from Deonar are now working as hairstylists and nurses, replacing a life of force, deception, fear and pain with hope and dignity.

Ravi Shankar Upadhyay's story titled, 'कचरा चुनने वाली बेटियों ने किया कमाल, मैट्रिक परीक्षा में सभी फर्स्ट डिवीजन से हुई पास', aptly describes that no matter where you start, what matters is where you finish. He writes about the five girls from the Musahar community of rag pickers who have passed the matriculation examination with a first division from Bihar Open School. These girls are the first to study and secure good marks in an exam, becoming an inspiration to the children around the area.

Reports of water shortage and conflicts on drinking water are reported every year. Instead of just turning on a tap for water, women in many households in India walk long distances, sometimes two-three times a day, to fetch water. Nida Rehman, in her article, 'अगरौठा: 107 मीटर पहाड़ काटने वाली 'जल सहेलियां' अपने गांव की भागीरथ हैं', tells us the story of the strong women of Agrotha, a small village in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. After 18 months of hard work, these women cut a mountain of about 107 meters and made a drain to fill water in the pond adjacent to the mountain. The aim was to aid farming activities and help

livestock, besides addressing the water crisis in the village. Similarly, Shalin Maria Lawrence, in her story, 'Fight like a woman', compares women who display aggression during their water filling task to female animals who are ready to pounce to provide for and protect their families. Shalin wishes that women would show this strength and steadfastness in political representation too, thus promoting women's sense of self-worth, ability to make their own choices, and right to influence social change for themselves and others.

The podcast series, 'beliEVE' by ElsaMarie D'Silva celebrates women achievers. In a world where ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman are often still narrowly defined by stereotypes and media messages, ElsaMarie celebrates these vanguards of change. From an IPS Officer to a composer, from the Postmaster General to a former Naval officer, ElsaMarie has talked to a range of successful women who have broken barriers through their careers. Bijaya Dwibedi, in his article, 'The Journey to Make Difference : From a Banker to a Successful Farmer', writes about Jayanti Mohapatra, who quit her job as a banker in the US and relocated to the Kalahandi district in Orissa to start her agro-based business called Manikstu Agro. Her company integrates high-tech farming, animal husbandry and food processing.. He describes how her mental resilience and fighting spirit is helping her pave the way for a better future for the people in her area.

The BBC Hindi video by Vandana Dhand, focusing on Indian sportswomen, features Vinesh Phogat and is titled, 'भारतीय खिलाड़ी ऑफ़ द ईयर: विनेश फोगाट ओलंपिक का ख़्वाब पूरा कर पाएंगी? This short video further celebrates the woman who, against all odds, was the first Indian woman wrestler to win gold in both the Commonwealth and Asian Games and her difficult journey to reach this far.

Highlighting the steadfastness and determination of women is the video report by Zeba Warsi titled, 'Anti-CAA Protests : How Protest Politics Acquired a Feminist Undertone', describes the role of Indian Muslim women at frontlines of anti-CAA protests. The report documents these protests as a symbolic journey for women who have broken away from their traditional 'caregivers' roles. Participation in these protests has provided them with a new identity that will change the pre-defined gender roles.

Finally, TRT World's video titled, 'First Rohingya Woman to Get into an Indian University', highlights 21-year-old Tasmida Johar's journey from a refugee to a student. She is studying for a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Delhi University, making her one of the few refugees pursuing university studies anywhere in the world.

All the featured articles highlight strong women and girls with unique journeys, with only one common destination: independence, the transformation of their lives, and making a positive impact on the lives of others.

‘मदर्स ऑफ़ इण्डिया’ पार्ट-4: बच्चे भूखे न सोएं इसलिए ये माँ बनाती है ट्रकों के पंचर

गांव कनेक्शन.कॉम

7 मार्च 2020

अपने बच्चों की परवरिश के लिए क्या-क्या करती हैं माएं? महिला दिवस के उपलक्ष्य में गांव कनेक्शन की विशेष सीरीज में मिलिए कुछ ऐसी मांओं से जो अपने परिवार के लिए दहलीज़ लांघकर, लीक से हटकर काम कर रही हैं। आज मिलिए पंचर बनाने वाली तरन्नुम से पंचर ट्यूब को जोड़ने में व्यस्त वो आसपास के माहौल से बेखबर थी। दुकान के आसपास कुछ लोगों का जमावड़ा लगा था सब उसे ही टकटकी लगाकर देख रहे थे गांव कनेक्शन टीम की आवाज़ से तरन्नुम का ध्यान टूटा।

“छोटी-छोटी जरूरतों के लिए बच्चों को रोता हुआ नहीं देख सकती थी। इन हाथों ने 23 साल पहले रिंच और हथौड़ा थामा था तबसे आज तक पंचर बना रही हूं, “पंचर बनाते हुए तरन्नुम बोलीं, “मैं अपने बच्चों को अच्छे स्कूल में पढ़ा नहीं सकी, इसका मुझे हमेशा मलाल रहेगा।” तरन्नुम वो बहादुर मां हैं जो अपने बच्चों की परवरिश के लिए 23 साल से उत्तर प्रदेश के लखनऊ में पंचर बना रही हैं। अभी इनकी दुकान छठा मील में है। तरन्नुम साईकिल से लेकर ट्रक तक के पंचर बना लेती हैं।

जिस उम्र में औरतें सजती-संवरती हैं, उस उम्र में तरन्नुम ने लोहे का औजार लेकर पंचर बनाने का काम शुरू कर दिया था। तरन्नुम को नहीं याद है कि अपने खुरदरे पड़ चुके हाथों में आखिरी बार कब मेंहदी लगाई थी? “पंचर की दुकान में इतनी आमदनी नहीं होती कि बच्चों को अच्छे स्कूल में पढ़ाया जा सके। पांच लोगों के खाने का ही इंतजाम करना मुश्किल होता है,” लकड़ी के एक बाक्स में हथौड़ा रखते हुए तरन्नुम बोलीं। देश की आधी आबादी में तरन्नुम (37 वर्ष) ग्रामीण क्षेत्र की वो महिला हैं जिन्होंने न केवल पुरुषों के काम को चुनौती देकर पंचर बनाने का हुनर सीखा बल्कि उत्तर प्रदेश की राजधानी लखनऊ में आकर अपने नाम की एक खास पहचान भी बनाई।

पंचर बनाने का ही काम क्यों चुना इस पर तरन्नुम ने बताया, “मुझे दूसरों के घरों में झाड़ू-पोछा करना पसंद नहीं था। गरीब हैं पर मालिक का रोज अपमान नहीं सह सकते थे। तभी अपना ये हुनर सीख लिया। आप आसपास तरन्नुम पंचर वाली का लीजिये सब मेरी दुकान का पता

बता देंगे।” सड़क चलते राहगीर जो वहां से पहली दफा गुजरते हैं अचानक से उनकी गाड़ी की रफ्तार कम हो जाती है, पैदल चलते लोगों के कदम ठिठक से जाते हैं। क्योंकि यहां उनकी नजर दुबली कदकाठी की उस तरन्नुम पर पड़ती है जो साइकिल से लेकर ट्रक तक का पंचर फुर्ती से बनाती है। ‘बेटी तुम बहुत आगे जाओगी, तुम्हें कभी किसी के आगे हाथ नहीं फैलाने पड़ेंगे।’ इस वाक्य को तरन्नुम आज तक नहीं भूल पायीं हैं। ये शब्द एक रिटायर्ड पुलिस वाले के थे जब तरन्नुम ने पहली बार आज से 23 साल पहले उनकी गाड़ी का पंचर बनाया था। ‘देखो कितना अच्छा काम कर रही है!... ‘घर भी संभालती और दुकान भी!... ‘सीखो इनसे!’ कुछ ऐसे वाक्य पंचर बनाते हुए तरन्नुम के कान में अकसर पड़ जाते हैं।



“अब तो बहुत से आदमी अपनी औरतों (पत्नियों) को लेकर मेरी दुकान पर मेरे काम को दिखाने लाते हैं। कुछ औरतों को मेरा काम अच्छा लगता है तो वो तारीफ़ करके जाती हैं तो कुछ इसे अच्छा नहीं मानतीं।” तरन्नुम हंसते हुए बोलीं। तरन्नुम मूल रूप से उत्तर प्रदेश के सीतापुर जिला मुख्यालय से लगभग 30 किलोमीटर दूर गंगापुरवा गांव की रहने वाली हैं। इनके दो बेटे और एक बेटी है। जब एक छोटे गाँव से निकलकर तरन्नुम लखनऊ आयीं थीं तब उन्हें अंदाजा नहीं था कि क्या करना है?

लेकिन आज लखनऊ के जानकीपुरम क्षेत्र में तरन्नुम वो नाम है जो आज किसी परिचय का मोहताज नहीं है। तरन्नुम पंचर वाली का नाम लेते ही लोग आपको इनकी दुकान तक पहुंचा देंगे। ये पेंटिंग भी करती हैं। पर इस मुकाम तक पहुंचना तरन्नुम के लिए कभी आसान नहीं था। मुश्किल हालातों के इनके पास अनगिनत किस्से हैं। “शादी के एक साल बाद ही मेरे पति ने मुझे ये अहसास करा दिया था कि मुझे भी कुछ काम करना पड़ेगा। वो एक दुकान पर पहले पंचर बनाते थे फिर अपनी दुकान खोल ली। उनको बनाते देख मैंने धीरे-धीरे पंचर बनाना सीख लिया।” हल्के हरे रंग का गले में दुपट्टा डालते हुए तरन्नुम बोलीं। गरीब परिवार में जन्मी तरन्नुम की शादी महज 15 साल की उम्र में हो गई थी। शादी के बाद इनके पति ज्यादातर बीमार ही रहते थे। पंचर बनाने में इनके पति की इतनी आमदनी नहीं होती थी जिससे उनका

इलाज चल सके और घर का खर्चा। यही वो समय था जब तरन्नुम को घर खर्च के लिए कुछ काम करना था। “एक साल तक मैंने खाना बनाने का काम किया जिसमें जरा सी गलती पर बहुत डांट पड़ती थी। मुझे खुद से लगने लगा था कि मैं ये काम नहीं कर सकती हूँ। पंचर बनाना झाड़ू-पोछा के काम से मुझे ज्यादा अच्छा लगता है,” तरन्नुम अपनी छोटी सी दुकान के दिखा रही थीं।

एक हाथ में घड़ी दूसरे हाथ में एक कंगन पहने उस दिन तरन्नुम लाल रंग का छींटदार सूट पहने पंचर बनाने में व्यस्त थीं। आज भी जब महिलाएं जब पुरुषों वाले काम करने की ठानती हैं तो उन्हें पुरुष प्रधान समाज अच्छा नहीं मानता है यही तरन्नुम के साथ भी हुआ। “शुरुआती दौर में लोग तरह-तरह की बातें बनाते थे। कोई कहता अब इनसे घर का काम नहीं होता तो सड़क पर बैठ गईं। उस समय ऐसा जमाना नहीं था। पहले ये काम पुरुष ही करते थे,” तरन्नुम अबतक एक ट्यूब का पंचर जोड़ चुकी थी।

“मेरी हमेशा से ख्वाहिश थी जिस दौर से मैं गुजरी हूँ उन हालातों से कभी मेरे बच्चों का वास्ता न हो। अपनी कोशिश में बेटी की अच्छे घर में शादी कर दी है,” तरन्नुम बोलीं, “दोनों बेटे मजदूरी करते हैं। अगर पढ़ा पाती तो शायद आज उन्हें ये काम न करना पड़ता।” इन 23 सालों में किसी ने तरन्नुम का हौसला बढ़ाया तो किसी ने उनके इस काम का विरोध किया। पर इनकी जिंदगी में बहुत कुछ बदला नहीं। इन्हें अपने नाम की एक पहचान तो मिल गयी पर घर की स्थिति बहुत नहीं सुधरी। ये 23 साल से झोपड़ी बनाकर रहती हैं।

“पंचर बनाने में मेहनत बहुत पड़ती है। अब तो नुक्कड़-नुक्कड़ पर दुकान है तभी ज्यादा आमदनी नहीं होती है। पर मैं खुश हूँ कमसेकम मेरे बच्चे भूखे तो नहीं सोते।” ये कहते हुए तरन्नुम के चेहरे पर संतोष था।



Gaon Connection is India's first professionally run rural newspaper founded by Neelesh Misra. He has covered some of the biggest stories out of South Asia.

MEET THE 'AGONY AUNTS' OF HARYANA

Bhartesh Singh Thakur

11 January 2020, The Tribune

From absurd, funny to heinous crimes, their job is to tackle everything patiently as they respond to hundreds of calls of hapless women with utmost dexterity at round-the-clock Haryana Women Helpline-181. They are abused and threatened at times, but still maintain their calm and stay polite.

Meet Ritu Rani (30) a postgraduate (PG) in human development, Priya (31) and Ritu Dahiya (32), post graduates in law, and Monika Bharadwaj (33), who has studied public administration. All four women take turns in attending hundreds of calls every day.

The Women Helpline, which operated from a small room at Women Police Station in Panchkula, completed one year recently. It received over 10,000 calls from December 2018 to November 30, 2019, but only 1,216 calls were effective. Close to 47 per cent calls were of domestic violence with maximum from Sirsa at 66, followed by Fatehabad (43) and Sonapat (40). "In case of domestic violence, we ask the police to intervene if it is a recent assault. Otherwise, we counsel husbands or mother-in-laws. We also refer cases to one stop centres (OSC) of respective districts for further guidance and counselling," says Priya.

The OSCs are now located in all districts and provide medical, legal and psychological guidance and work under the Women and Child Development department. "There are specific requests from women for advising husbands. Ego issues between couples are more. Alcoholic husbands are a major problem. They abuse and beat up women. When husbands are approached, they also list their issues. We remain engaged with them over weeks to resolve the problems," she adds. "We keep calling women back to take feedback even after the issue is resolved," says Ritu Dahiya.

The women helpline has received 23 complaints of husbands having an extra marital affair, 38 of stalking, including that over phone, 10 complaints of rape and 18 of refusal of marriage. "Some women

callers are harsh. There have been instances when they have abused our respondents. Even then, they don't lose their temper. They take them into confidence," says Preeti Phogat, helpline manager. "The drill is to speak politely with callers. Sometimes people threaten us to approach PM Modi," explains Monika Bharadwaj.

"Seldom, women approach with false complaints. They want to take revenge with their men. So, we have to be cautious," says Dahiya. Not just over the phone, they sometimes call aggrieved women of nearby districts to their office in Panchkula for counselling or accompany them to the higher officials for help. "In NRI marriage frauds, I had accompanied women to the Regional Passport Officer," says Priya.

These women respondents have undergone training with the State Resource Centre for Women at Panchkula. In the house of agony aunts, everyone has a success story to narrate. Bharadwaj tells how she managed to rescue seven-eight women from the clutches of human traffickers.

"In March-April of 2019, a 28-year-old widow told us that she was brought from Barnala and had been married to a sarpanch's son in Narnaul. She was told that she was bought and would be sold further," says Bharadwaj. "She was being threatened that she would be burnt down in case she raised her voice. I continued to coordinate with her. She sent her husband's Aadhaar card, from where we were able to track her exact location. We raided the place and saved seven-eight women," she said.

In another case, a woman was thrown out of her house after 18 days of marriage at midnight in Panipat. She was caught talking to someone over the phone. Priya remained in touch with her for hours as the police initially refused any help. Her parents also refused to intervene. "The SP was called, who further sent a DSP along with a woman cop to shift her to Karnal's shelter home. She was rescued by 3 am. Later, we convinced her parents who took her back," tells Priya.

Ritu Rani encountered a case of a seven-month pregnant woman from Punjab, who left for Ambala alone to trace her husband, who met with an accident. "It was midnight. Her husband's phone was switched off. She called us. We provided her transport. We remained in touch with her till she reached her husband," narrates Rani.

Nature	Number of complaints
Domestic Violence	569
Dispute with neighbour, kidnapping, theft and counselling	242
Misbehaviour/Physical Hurt/Assault	127
Women Schemes	38
Stalking/Phone Stalking	38
Missing	35
Dowry	26
Extra marital affairs/divorce	23
Land Dispute/Property Dispute	19
Refusal of Marriage	18
Abuse/Threat/Eve Teasing	17
Total	1216*

Dahiya was instrumental in dismissal of a top executive at a Multi-National Company (MNC) in a case of sexual harassment at workplace. "Her boss was forcing her to have physical relations. We approached the police in the case," says Dahiya. She also red-flagged a case of gang-rape of a maid in Hisar, where a politician was involved.

Besides complaints of domestic violence, there are 242 complaints (around 20 %) related to dispute with neighbour, kidnapping, theft and

counselling, while there are 127 complaints (over 10 %) of misbehaviour, physical hurt or assault. Has counselling brought any change in them? Priya replies: "I have learnt patience. I have become sensitive. I have been able to resolve a few personal problems as well." Bharadwaj, meanwhile, says: "There are a lot of expectations from us. We are more mature now."



Bhartesh Singh Thakur has fourteen years of experience with expertise in court reporting and has covered prominent cases of Haryana at the trial court level. Presently, he works as a Principal Correspondent with The Tribune for four years and covers the Haryana region for the paper.

शिक्षित होकर खुद काबिल बनीं, अब फैला रही शिक्षा की नई रोशनी

सिकंदर पारीक

9 अगस्त 2020, राजस्थान पत्रिका

- परम्पराओं व समाज के तानों-धमकियों के बावजूद पढ़ी कोयलवाव की आदिवासी बालाएं
- अब शिक्षा क्षेत्र में कार्यरत, बढ़ा रही हैं बालिकाओं के नामांकन
- बदल गई जीवन शैली, पहाड़ों पर रहने वाले हाथों ने थाम ली अब स्टेयरिंग

पाली

पाली जिले के आदिवासी बाहुल्य कोयलवाव गांव की बहनें सीता और लीला गरासिया। जब इनके समाज में बालिकाओं के लिए शिक्षा सपना मात्र थी, तब पहली बार घर से कई किलोमीटर दूर पढ़ने को निकली। परिवार को समाज से बहिष्कृत करने की धमकियों के साथ ताने भी खूब सुने, लेकिन शिक्षा की उड़ान में पीछे नहीं लौटी। मेहनत रंग लाई सीता दसवीं के बाद एसटीसी में चयनित होकर अध्यापिका और लीला गरासिया ने समाज में पहली स्नातक बालिका होने का गौरव प्राप्त किया। आज दोनों ही सरकारी स्कूल में प्रधानाध्यापिका का दायित्व संभाल रही हैं। एक समय वह भी था, जब गांव में यातायात के साधन तक नहीं थे, आज दोनों बहनें पहाड़ी पर स्थित स्कूल में स्वयं की कार से आवाजाही कर रही हैं। बालिका शिक्षा के प्रति अब पूरी तरह समर्पित हैं। लीला व उसके साथियों की समझाइश का ही परिणाम है कि उसके ससुराल देवला (उदयपुर) के सीनियर स्कूल में बालिकाओं का नामांकन बालकों से अधिक है।

यों शुरू हुआ सफर वर्ष 1984 का अगस्त माह, जब गांव में पहुंचे कुछ सर्वोदयी विचारकों की नजर शिक्षा से महरूम बालिकाओं पर पड़ी। उनके अध्ययन के लिए बातचीत की तो आर्थिक परेशानियों से लेकर समाज की परम्पराएं आड़े आईं। कई बार समझाइश के बाद आखिर पांच बालिकाओं के परिजन राजी हुए। रानी शहर के पास स्थित एक बालिका शिक्षण संस्थान में इनके लिए शिक्षण व आवास की व्यवस्था की गई। समाज के कुछ लोग लगातार परिजनों पर उन्हें वापस बुलाने का दबाव बनाते रहे। इस बीच पांच बालिकाओं में से दो वापस चली आईं और कुछ ने अनुत्तीर्ण होने पर स्कूल छोड़ दिया, लेकिन अपने हौसलों की उड़ान भरने के लिए सीता गरासिया वहां डटी रही। दूसरी कक्षा से लेकर दसवीं तक वहां पढ़ी। दसवीं में सप्लीमेंट्री

आई तो किसी की मदद लेकर फीस भरी और बेहतर अंकों से उत्तीर्ण हुई। अपनी साथी मोहनी व संगी गरासिया का हौसला बढ़ाकर उन्हें भी दसवीं करवाई। फिर एसटीसी कर तीनों ही अध्यापिका बनी। इस बीच बहन लीला गरासिया व जयंता गरासिया को भी पढ़ाया। लीला के स्नातक करने के बाद सीता ने भी स्नातक व स्नातकोत्तर किया। आज लीला भी सरकारी स्कूल में प्रधानाध्यापिका है तो छोटी बहन जयंता बतौर शिक्षाकर्मी स्कूल में कार्यरत है। पांच बहनों में से तीन अध्यापिकाएं और दो अभी अध्ययनरत हैं।

आसान नहीं रही शिक्षा की उड़ान पहाड़ी इलाकों में छितराई बस्ती का गांव कोयलवाव। जहां लोगों के पास न पहनने के कपड़े और ना ही खाने को अनाज। शिक्षा से बच्चे महरूम, बालिका शिक्षा के प्रति सोचना तो दूर की बात थी। ऐसे में सीता, लीला व जयंता जैसी बालिकाओं ने अच्छे मार्गदर्शन की बदौलत शिक्षा को बदलाव का हथियार बनाया। खुद शिक्षित हुई, परिवार को शिक्षित किया और अब समाज की कई बालिकाओं को शिक्षा की लौ से बदलाव का उजियारा दिखा रही है। टापरे को पक्के मकान में बदल दिया है। गांव की मिट्टी का जुड़ाव तो है लेकिन शहरीकरण में भी पूरी रच-बस गई है। बकौल सीता व लीला गरासिया न केवल आदिवासी समाज बल्कि अन्य बालिकाओं की शिक्षा के लिए लगातार प्रयासरत हैं। स्कूल में भी नामांकन बढ़ाने के लिए पूरा जोर लगाते हैं क्योंकि शिक्षा का महत्व हमें बरसों पहले समझ आ चुका है, जिसकी बदौलत ही यह मुकाम हासिल हो सका।



Sikander Pareek is presently the Zonal editor of Rajasthan Patrika in Jodhpur. With many awards in the field of journalism, Mr. Pareek has actively covered stories on rural development, water conservation and women's empowerment.

MAHARASHTRA: TRAFFICKED GIRLS SCRIPT SUCCESS STORIES AT DEONAR SHELTER

Nitasha Natu

4 February 2020, The Times of India

MUMBAI: January 26 was the second time Aradhya pushed open the creaking gate of the Deonar home for underaged trafficking survivors and stepped in. This time, she was not the frightened, confused teenager she had been eight years ago. Aradhya (25) holds an engineering diploma and works with a private company—something she had never dreamt of doing while lodged at the shelter. “I used to be angry all the time and felt like I had been kept in a prison. But it is here that your new life will begin if you are willing to give yourself a chance,” she advised a bunch of 20 minors currently housed at the shelter, during a special reception organised to honour the home’s success stories. Like Aradhya, over two dozen other girls trooped into the shelter this past Sunday, some of whom now work as hairstylists at reputed salons, one is an MBA and another a full-time animal rescuer and nurse.

“Each of the girls who attended the reception have had a tough life. Some were sold into the flesh trade by their own families. But they have still triumphed and we want the current inmates to take inspiration from them,” said Pratibha Ovhal, superintendent of the shelter.

Shloka (26), a former inmate, recounts her days at a red light area in Grant Road with a shudder. “I was an orphan and lived with adoptive parents in Madhya Pradesh. They sent me to Mumbai to work when I was young. I was brought to Congress House, was never allowed to go out and was forced to see customers. One night, I managed to slip out. I was in a nightie with just Rs 50 hidden in my clothes. I got into a cab but the driver had a roving eye and I jumped out at Mumbai Central station. I went from one police station to another before being brought to this shelter,” said Shloka. She could not read or write but took an interest in jewellery-making classes that an NGO organised. She now makes jewellery professionally for a living.

When an underage trafficking survivor enters the shelter, she is often emotionally scarred and it takes a long time for her to start trusting people again. "A new inmate could throw things at us or yell. She may also try to run away from the shelter. We devote more time to them. All our staff are women. There are also weekly sessions by counsellors," said the shelter's caretaker Usha Jadhav.

On turning 18, inmates leave the shelter. If their parents were responsible for pushing them into the flesh trade, the girls are not sent back home. They are moved to open hostels where NGOs provide after care. "Trainers find out where a girl's interest lies. If she wants to pursue higher studies, we fund her college fees and provide a stipend for travel. Many of the girls opt to work alongside college," said Jyoti Nale, director of Save the Children India, a non-profit.

Niharika, another former inmate, has made up her mind to become a social worker as she can understand better than others the ordeal of a trafficking survivor. "I had come to Mumbai with my mother after her divorce and we lived in Malwani. An 'aunty' offered me a cleaning job in a house but instead forced me to see customers. They threatened me into silence by claiming they had shot a video. Later, they also roped my cousin into the trade. This went on for months before we were rescued in a police raid. My mother still doesn't know the details of why I was rescued," she said. Niharika did not speak any language but Odia. "At the shelter, I used to contemplate suicide... There was nothing to live for. Gradually, I picked up Hindi and resumed studies, clearing my SSC. I'm now looking for a job and have gone back to living with my mother," she said. According to the National Crime Records Bureau's 2018 data, Maharashtra led in the number of victims trafficked (795) as well as victims rescued (791). More than 90% of these victims are girls.

(Names of all shelter inmates have been changed to protect their identities)



Nitasha Natu is a Senior Assistant Editor with the Times of India. Over the past 17 years, she has written extensively on gender, human rights, state of Indian prisons, violence against women and children and national security. In 2015, she was the only journalist from India selected for a reporting fellowship by the International Reporting Project (IRP).

कचरा चुनने वाली बेटियों ने किया कमाल, मैट्रिक परीक्षा में सभी फर्स्ट डिवीजन से हुई पास

रविशंकर उपाध्याय

8 मार्च 2020, प्रभात खबर

पटना के मनेर प्रखंड के मोहरी बगीचा, हाथीकंद सराय में स्थित सिस्टर निवेदिता बालिका स्कूल में शनिवार का दिन बेहद खास था। यहां मिठाई बंट रही थी, खुशी के मारे बच्चे फूले नहीं समा रहे थे और यहां की शिक्षिकाएं भी खुद को गौरवान्वित महसूस कर रही थीं। क्योंकि यहां मुसहर समुदाय की पांच वैसी बच्चियों ने बिहार खुला विद्यालय से मैट्रिक की परीक्षा फर्स्ट डिवीजन से पास की है जो राजधानी के विभिन्न स्लमों में रहकर कचरा चुनने का काम करती थीं। शुक्रवार को जब मैट्रिक परीक्षा का परिणाम आया तो सभी की खुशी का ठिकाना नहीं था। सभी बच्चियों ने 63 फीसदी से ज्यादा का स्कोर किया है।

मैट्रिक की डिग्री हासिल करने वाली ये न केवल अपने परिवार की पहली पीढ़ी में शामिल हो गयी हैं बल्कि अपने परिवार और स्कूल के लिए गर्व का भी विषय बन चुकी हैं। रंकी ने 76%, उर्मिला ने 72%, जूली ने 70% सुंदरी ने 68% और शोभा ने 63% अंक हासिल किये हैं। सुपरिटेण्डेंट शिल्पी कहती हैं कि सभी लड़कियां 5.30 में उठकर योग करती हैं और सुबह रिविजन के बाद 10 बजे से 3 बजे तक स्कूल में पढ़ाई। दिन में 3-5 खेलती थी और फिर रात में 12 बजे तक पढ़ती थी। इस बीच डांस के साथ ही एक्स्ट्रा क्यूरिक्यूलर एक्टिविटीज में भाग लेती हैं। इसके कारण सभी ने बहुत बढ़िया परफॉर्म किया।

सभी बच्चियों की जिंदगी कचरे के इर्द-गिर्द बसती थी। छह बहनों में पांचवें नंबर पर जूली का घर गोसाईंटोला में है। मां कचरा चुनने का काम करती थी। छह साल की उम्र में पिता रामप्रवेश मांझी की मौत हो गयी तो वह भी कचरा चुनने में मां का हाथ बंटाने लगी। इसी बीच वह इस स्कूल में आ गयी। नेहरु नगर, पटना की ही रंकी कुमारी के पिता ठेला चलाते हैं। मां घरों में काम करती है। जहां कोई पढ़ने नहीं जाती थी, वहां सब रंकी से प्रेरित होती है। दीधा की सुंदरी कुमारी की मां स्कूल में रसोईया का काम करती है। जब 2010 में यह यहां पहुंची तो कचरा चुनती थी। माहौल ठीक नहीं था। 50 रुपया दिनभर काम करने के बाद मिलता था। यहां आयी तो जिंदगी बदल गयी। जलालपुर, दानापुर की शोभा कुमारी के पापा लेबर हैं मां आंगनबाड़ी में रसोईया। अब इससे आसपास के लोग खुशामद करते हैं कि उनके बच्चों का भी

एडमिशन करा दो। नेहरू नगर की उर्मिला अपनी बहन रिकी से सीख लेकर यहां आयी थी। सभी बच्चियों से जुड़ी हुई हैं उम्मीदें।

संस्था की संस्थापक सचिव नंदिता बनर्जी कहती हैं कि सभी लड़कियों ने अच्छे नंबरों से मैट्रिक की परीक्षा पास की है। सबने बहुत मेहनत की है। पहले बैच की सफलता से हम सब बहुत खुश हैं। ये लड़कियां अब इंटर में जायेंगी और अपने परिवार के साथ ही सूबे का नाम रोशन करेंगी।



Ravi Shankar Upadhyay has been a freelance journalist since 2020. He has worked for Prabhat Khabar, Patna, and as Bureau Chief of Hindustan, Jharkhand, amongst other publications.

अगरौठा: 107 मीटर पहाड़ काटने वाली 'जल सहेलियां' अपने गांव की भागीरथ हैं

निदा रहमान

17 अक्टूबर 2020, हिंदी.न्यूज़18.कॉम

ये जल सहेलियां अपने गांव की भागीरथ हैं, जिन्होंने पहाड़ को काटकर अपने गांव की किस्मत बदल दी। अब यही महिलाएं बछेड़ी नदी पर भी काम करेंगी। घर परिवार की ज़िम्मेदारी उठाने के बाद भी चट्टान से इरादों वाली महिलाओं ने चट्टान को तोड़ दिया। अब कौन कहेगा कि नाज़ुक कलाइयां कमज़ोर होती हैं।

किसी को कमज़ोर कहना हो, किसी का विरोध करना हो तो उसे चूड़ियां दे दो, या ये कह दो कि चूड़ियां पहन लो। लेकिन क्या चूड़ियों वाले हाथ वाकई नाकारे, निकम्मे, कमज़ोर होते हैं? जिन कलाइयों में चूड़ियां होती हैं वो किसी से कमज़ोर होती हैं वो पुरुषों से पीछे होती हैं? ये सारे भ्रम और सारी गलतफहमियां एक झटके में दूर हो जाती हैं जब यही चूड़ी पहने हुई कलाइयां हाथों में घन, फावड़ा, कुदाल लेकर एक पहाड़ काट देती हैं। जी हां ये कोई कहानी नहीं, कोई फिल्म नहीं ना ही फ़साना। ये हकीकत है उस इलाके की जहां की औरतें आधी रात को उठकर कुएं में पानी आने का इंतज़ार करती थी। ख़ूब लड़ाई झगड़े होते थे, घंटों के इंतज़ार के बाद पीने का पानी नसीब होता था। लेकिन इन चूड़ी पहनी हुई कलाइयों ने अपनी मेहनत से अपने गांव की तस्वीर बदल दी है। और उन जल सहेलियों की चर्चा दूर-दूर तक हो रही है। हर कोई जानना चाहता है कि आखिर कौन हैं ये जल सहेलियां और क्या कमाल कर दिया है इन्होंने। हम भी मिलने को बेकरार थे इन औरतों से जिन्होंने अपने पहाड़ से इरादों से पहाड़ को काट दिया और खोल दिए पानी के रास्ते।

देश के नक्शे पर अगरौठा

मध्यप्रदेश के छतरपुर ज़िले का एक छोटा सा गांव अगरौठा। जिसकी कोई पहचान नहीं थी वो भी दूसरे गांवों की तरह बिल्कुल सामान्य सा गांव था। लेकिन ऐसा क्या हुआ कि अचानक से हर कोई इस गांव को पहचानने लगा। मीडिया का जमावड़ा लग गया और जनप्रतिनिधि से लेकर प्रशासनिक अधिकारी सभी पहुंचे इस गांव में। छतरपुर से लगभग 95 किलोमीटर दूर अगरौठा सुर्खियों में यहां की महिलाओं की वजह से आया है। गांव की औरतों ने वो कर दिया है, जिसके लिए हिम्मत, ताकत, जज़्बा और मेहनत सब चाहिए। यहां की औरतों ने 18

महीने की जी तोड़ मेहनत के बाद लगभग 107 मीटर का पहाड़ काट दिया और उससे बना दिया एक नाला जिससे पहाड़ से लगा हुआ चंदेलकालीन तालाब में पानी भरने लगा। पहले ये पानी पहाड़ से पीछे से ही पास बहने वाली बछेड़ी नदी में चला जाता था। बुंदेलखंड सालों से सूखे की मार झेल रहा है। यहां का जसस्तर नीचे जा रहा है। इलाके के जल स्रोत सूख रहे हैं। लेकिन अब अगरौठा का वाटर लेबिल बढ़ गया है। इस साल कम बारिश होने के बावजूद तालाब में काफ़ी पानी है। गांव के कुएं और हैंड पंप भी पानी दे रहे हैं। लेकिन दो साल पहले के हालात भी इस गांव के वही थे जो बुंदेलखंड के बाकी इलाकों के हैं। यहां सबसे बड़ी परेशानी पानी की थी।

कैसे शुरू हुआ काम?

औरतों को एकजुट करने का काम किया परमार्थ समाज सेवी संस्था ने। जिसके संस्थापक डॉ. संजय सिंह हैं। जल जन जोड़ो अभियान के तरह परमार्थ संस्था बुंदेलखंड के गांवों में जल स्रोतों को ज़िंदा करने का काम कर रही है। इसमें स्थानीय महिलाओं को शामिल किया जाता है। संस्था गांव में 20 या 25 महिलाओं की एक पानी पंचायत बनाती है, जिसमें अध्यक्ष, सचिव, कोषाध्यक्ष होते हैं। पानी पंचायत की सदस्य महिलाएं फिर गांव की बाकी महिलाओं को पानी के लिए जागरूक करती हैं उन्हें समझाती हैं। फिर बनाई जाती हैं जल सहेलियां। इन्हें जल सहेलियों ने पहाड़ काटा और पास के तालाब को एक तरह से ज़िंदा किया है। इसके पहले गांव में छोटे छोटे चैक डेम, स्टाप डेम बनाए गए। धीरे धीरे करके गांव का वाटर लेवल बढ़ गया। छतरपर से लगभग 95 किलोमीटर दूर स्थित अगरौठा गांव यहां की महिलाओं की वजह से सुखियों में आया।

कैसे एकसाथ आई जल सहेलियां?

परमार्थ संस्था ने अगरौठा के आसपास के गांव में पहले काम किया था। पनवारी गांव के मिही लाल लगभग 5 साल से जल जन जोड़ो अभियान से जुड़े हैं इन्हें जल योद्धा की उपाधि दी गई है। मिली लाल ने अपने आसपास के इलाकों के तालाबों का जिर्णोधार करवाया है। जहां पीने के पानी की दिक्कत थी यहां आज लोग खेती तक कर पा रहे हैं। अगरौठा गांव में औरतों को समझाने का काम किया 18 साल की लड़की बबीता राजपूत ने। बबीता को शुरु में मुश्किलों सामना करना पड़ा लेकिन बाद में औरतों को बात समझ में आई और वो श्रमदान करने को तैयार हुईं। बबीता कहती हैं कि औरतों को समझाना ज़्यादा मुश्किल नहीं रहा लेकिन गांव के कुछ पुरुषों ने इस काम में रुकावटें डालीं औरतों भड़काया और काम ना करने को कहा। बबीता ने बताया कि अब हमारे गांव में पानी की कोई दिक्कत नहीं है।

60 साल की कली बाई की शादी को 40 साल से ज़्यादा हो गए हमेशा पीने के पानी की दिक्कत रही। गर्मियों में तो आधी आधी रात को पानी के लिए जाना पड़ा। घंटों खड़े रहने के बाद भी लड़ाई झगड़े होते और बामुश्किल दो घड़े पानी मिल पाता। कली बाई कहती हैं कि हमने सर्दी गर्मी में सुबह 10 बजे से शाम तक पहाड़ काटा है। पैरों और हाथों में छाले पड़ गए थे लेकिन पानी आने से उनके छालों की तकलीफ़ कम पड़ गई। कल्लो बाई मायके जाकर अपने माता पिता से कहती थी कि कहां ऐसे गांव में पटक दिया है जहां पीने का पानी तक नहीं है। लेकिन अब वो खुश हैं। गांव की तकरीबन 200 से 250 जल सहेलियों ने अपने बूते पर पानी की मुश्किल दूर कर ली।

हालांकि यहां तक पहुंचने का सफ़र आसान नहीं था, क्योंकि पहाड़ की ज़मीन वन विभाग की थी और उसे काटने की इजाज़त वन विभाग नहीं दे रहा था। लेकिन महिलाएं ज़िद पर अड़ गईं. उन्होंने वन विभाग के अधिकारियों से बात की और समझाया कि एक नाला बन जाने से गांव में पानी ही पानी हो जाएगा। बाद में वन विभाग के अधिकारी भी इस बात पर राज़ी हो गए।

परमार्थ संस्था से जुड़े धनीराम रैकवार ने बताया कि जब वो अगरौठा गांव गए तो देखा कि यहां दो हैंडपंप हैं जिसमें भी पानी सूख जाता है। गांव पहाड़ों से घिरा है लेकिन सारा पानी तालाब में आने के बजाए बछेड़ी नदी में चला जाता है। अगर तालाब और जंगल के बीच में आने वाले पहाड़ को काट देते हैं तो तालाब भर जाएगा। पहाड़ काटने के पहले इलाके में चेक डैम स्टाप डैम, बोर रिचार्ज, कुआं रिचार्ज का काम किया जिससे ज़मीन का वाटर लेवल बढ़ा। पहाड़ की बड़ी चट्टान को तोड़ने के लिए एक दिन जेसीबी की मदद ली गई लेकिन रोज़ाना 200 के ऊपर जल सहेलियों ने पूरा पहाड़ काट दिया।

जल जन जोड़ो अभियान

इस अभियान की शुरुआत लगभग 25 साल पहले हुई थी. परमार्थ संस्था के फाउंडर डॉ. संजय सिंह ने बताया कि उनकी संस्था पहले वैकल्पिक शिक्षा पर काम करती थी। लेकिन चंबल के इलाके में काम करते वक्त एक बुजुर्ग महिला ने कहा कि शिक्षा और स्वास्थ्य का काम हम खुद कर लेंगे और कुछ करना चाहते हैं तो हमारे इलाके में पानी की दिक्कत दूर कर दीजिए। बस उसके बाद से डॉ. संजय सिंह और उनकी टीम का मक़सद बदल गया। परमार्थ संस्था बुंदेलखंड में पानी को लेकर काम कर रही है। जल जन जोड़ो अभियान के तरह संस्था चंदेलकालीन और बुंदेलकालीन तालाबों को रिवाइव करने काम कर रहे हैं, 300 अधिक गांवों में पानी पंचायत और जल सहेली बनाई हैं।

संजय सिंह बताते हैं कि उन्होंने स्थानीय महिलाओं और लोगों के सहयोग से लगभग 1600 से जल स्रोत पुनर्जीवीत किए और बनाए। हालांकि इसका खामियाजा संजय सिंह को अपने पिता की हत्या के रूप में चुकाना पड़ा। जो लोग नहीं चाहते थे कि परमार्थ संस्था ये काम करे उन्होंने इनके पिता की हत्या कर दी। लेकिन संस्था लगातार अपनी कोशिश में लगी है। पानी को लेकर जो काम हो रहा है वो ठीकमगढ़। झांसी, जालौन, ललितपुर, हमीरपुर सबसे ज्यादा है। अगरौठा के आसपास भी काम हुआ है।

ये जल सहेलियां अपने गांव की भागीरथ हैं, जिन्होंने पहाड़ को काटकर अपने गांव की किस्मत बदल दी। अब यही महिलाएं बछेड़ी नदी पर भी काम करेंगी। घर परिवार की ज़िम्मेदारी उठाने के बाद भी चट्टान से इरादों वाली महिलाओं ने चट्टान को तोड़ दिया। अब कौन कहेगा कि नाज़ुक कलाइयां कमज़ोर होती हैं।



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FIGHT LIKE A WOMAN

Shalin Maria Lawrence

29 July 2020, VanakkamFrance.FR

Have you noticed how familiar it is to see women fight at the waterfront? A typical municipal pump where women fight their hearts out with other women for a single pot of water. Minor quarrels escalate to roughest physical encounters, including broken bones and bloodshed. It is a war!

Men often make fun of these fights as a “waterfront quarrel” between two women. It has become a common metaphor for men to tease women who are adamant about getting what they want through a hard fight. I strongly criticised the ‘waterfront fights’ until my experience around the subject and wisdom taught me otherwise.

You see, no matter how enslaved women are in their homes, their individuality and personality shine through remarkably in such fights, especially in places like waterfronts, ration shops and grocery stores where they fight for their livelihood. With passion in their eyes, a sudden burst of strength in their bodies and righteous indignation, they move like a tigress looking for prey for her cubs. Yet, to our wonder, they do not exhibit this behaviour during everyday situations. One might think, “Oh! is this the woman who was fighting so ferociously at the street pipe half-hour back? How come she looks and behaves so differently now?” Yes. A few moments back, she was at war, and now she is just taking care of her daily chores. Water is war. Access to resources is a war for women in India.

This behaviour is what makes women unique. This combativeness and a fighter’s spirit helps them to sustain their livelihood. This extraordinary virtue is found commonly in female animals. It is a selfless virtue focused solely on the welfare of others. The pot of water is not just for her; it provides for the whole family. It may seem like a selfish act at first glance, but if you think deeply, you will find that it is for the common good and adheres to a woman’s true nature. This is why I say ‘waterfront fights’ are not ugly; they’re not shameful, but in fact, are the best examples of how far women can go to protect the people dependent on them. That’s why I emphasise that men should refrain from ridiculing women when they fight

for their livelihood. Because to be honest, men cannot achieve a quarter of what women have achieved. But, at the same time, my frustration is that women's passion and strength in the fights for livelihood is not evident in more significant issues.

Let me explain. Women play a vital role in the struggle for social welfare and environmental protection in the state. Statistically, the women take part in large numbers in battles and demonstrations against social and environmental issues, be it Koodankulam, Sterlite protest for Neduvasal. But it would always be led by a man. Men who realise the importance of women in the protests and demonstrations persuade women to be a part of them but do not give them the right to lead. The Shaheen Bagh protests are the only ones led entirely by women in contemporary times. In addition, many of the major demonstrations in the villages are still being waged by women solely. These women have led the protests against TASMAL (the government-run liquor shops) and are often imprisoned.

The women in Tamil Nadu are still fighting against female foeticide and domestic violence, making a women's role in micro-politics even more significant. Women do not give up easily when fighting, and they do not leave their children at home like men. We have seen women fighting the state with their children clinging to their bodies. Have you seen a man with a kid around him in a protest? This proves that women are more responsible, unlike men.

Women cannot be easily ignored and don't compromise easily. They are adamant, steadfast in their beliefs, find mistakes easily, criticise and question everything, and are more intuitive. These are the qualities men often point out as women's weaknesses or bad habits, unaware that these are the remarkable strengths of women. These qualities make women better than men in many things, and these are the qualities that reiterate why women would make better leaders. Therefore, women should engage in the politics of a country and can be essential in taking the right decisions in social welfare matters.

You will notice that men demonise these traits, using them against women who succumb to them even after realising what men can do. If a male politician is bold, people call him brave, and when a female politician reflects the same, she is considered "arrogant". In the blanket of criticism, female politicians have been called names like loudmouths, fighters,

unwomanly, not cultured, etc., to intimidate them. This is done to force them to be submissive and subservient indirectly. If this is the case for the women already in politics, imagine the social pressures for women who aspire to become politicians. Many types of research and papers have been published with important data detailing the importance of the role of women in politics. Importantly, these researches emphasise the need for women leaders, especially in politics.

Qualities like deciding without bias, making important decisions during emergencies without fear, looking at things from an alternative perspective, finding better solutions to problems, and making suitable choices are essential strengths of women political leaders highlighted by these researches. One should not immediately generalise by highlighting a couple of women politicians who might not have fared well. They are not even a sample size. Researchers also cite examples of how countries progressed if women were given ample opportunities. Especially in the sub-Saharan African countries, there have been many positive changes and developments since the intervention of female political leaders. For example, in Rwanda, 61 per cent of women are in politics. Due to this, their social and economic indicators show tremendous growth. Similarly, women politicians in New Zealand, Finland, Belgium, Denmark and Georgia etc., have brought about significant political and social changes which have attracted the world's attention.

Not only as political leaders, but women taking decisions at all levels is good for the democracy of that country. There are many reasons for this; wherever there is an adequate female representation, equality and equity prevail, and inclusive growth becomes a reality. In particular, women tend to restore some critical principles and social interests that the respective parties/movements are missing. Also, the protection and rights of women in political parties are guaranteed when women hold influential positions in large numbers.

Worldwide, 77 per cent of parliamentarians are men. Even though there is a Union Cabinet ministry for Social Justice in India, thirty-three per cent reservation for women is still a dream. The most crucial question is why India doesn't give its women equal opportunity while boasting to be the most cultured country.

We have to note that when women are represented equally in parliament, legislatures and local bodies can fight for the rights and laws long denied. But, unfortunately, men make up the majority of the law and legal amendments in this country with negligible female participation. Even more painful is that all kinds of important decisions involving women are also discussed and decided by men.

Should sanitary napkins be taxed?

Is 'marital rape' a crime under the law?

Does a woman have abortion rights?

The men discuss, the men legislate, and the men pass these laws Atrocious.

That is why many vital decisions favour men, including the legal age of women. Similarly, four men sit in the majority and judge whether women can enter temples or not. What a great disgrace! Are male politicians utterly aware of what women want in the first place? Are education and job opportunities enough for women?

All the election manifestos that scream of women's rights, privileges for women are all matters that are generally in favour of men. For example, a political party's election manifesto asked for 'gun rights for women' to protect them from violence. Now imagine being a woman walking to a market, going to work in a train, commuting in a bus; all common areas of violence, making an effort to carry the gun in their bags along with baby diapers, feeding bottles etc., loading the bullets and shooting the culprits. How practical is it? What do we need here precisely? Firearms for women or the change in the attitude of men? They should propose training for men and their mindset, change of laws, proper implementation of rules, a judiciary monitoring system, and active monitoring of police cases. Instead, they would rather burden the women even more by creating a problem to solve an existing problem. If women were part of this manifesto committee, I'm very confident they would have come up with a practical solution to the issue of violence. You see, to think 'for' women and to think 'like' women are two very different things.

Everything men propose here as a solution and rights for women comes from their point of view. That is why the role of women in politics is essential. Similarly, the country has seen many male leaders and politicians over history. So there is gender to the politics of this country. Political critics and analysts know precisely where these gendered politics has placed us socially and economically. So there is a huge need for

Indian politics to be more 'women' in nature. The need for more women politicians here is vital.

We need ferocious women leaders in the social fields.

We need women who will not give up their rightful place in politics.

We need women who can stubbornly get their rights.

Women are required to critique the course of politics without prejudice.

We need women who act with ideological determination without fearing the enemy.

Women should learn to manifest the energy, determination and fighting spirit they display at the "waterfront fights" into politics for the common good of society. Yes, women should be 'fighters' when it comes to politics. They should fight for their rights without considering it a shame but an absolute necessity. They should fight for their rights like a boxer in a ring. But not against each other. Instead, women should fight with conservative men, with this patriarchal society that has been robbing them of their opportunities for so long. Women should fight.

(Translated from Tamil to English)



Shalin Maria Lawrence is an independent journalist and an author. She is a Dalit activist and a feminist who writes freely about the intersectionality of caste, class and gender. She works with rural Tamil women of Tamil Nadu in fighting violence against women and imparts leadership training to rural women from oppressed communities.

beliEVE (Podcast)

ElsaMarie D'Silva

Awaaz.com

beliEVE Podcast on aawaz.com Award Entry for 'The 11th Edition Laadli Media and Advertising Awards for Gender Sensitivity 2021' Concept: The 'beliEVE' podcast is a pun and portmanteau of 'believe' and 'eve' that tells inspiring stories of women. It is driven to uphold their spirit, grit, valour, struggles, belief, and efforts in breaking the glass ceiling. The podcast is hosted with Ms. ElsaMarie D'Silva and it is produced, hosted & distributed by aawaz.com, the largest spoken-word audio and podcast network in Indian languages. Through its various conversations, host Elsa brings out the hidden stories in the lives of extraordinary women. The series brings together a diverse roster of women from varied fields, including entrepreneurs, educators, artists, athletes, changemakers, activists, therapists, armed forces, among others. Results: The podcast with 14 unique stories (episodes), exclusive on aawaz, is in the Top 3 audio shows in aawaz English programming.

It has generated 1mn+ impressions organically across endpoints like social media, aawaz app and website. In an attention-deficit digital world where skipping in 5 seconds is the norm, our users have consumed 330,000+ minutes of the beliEVE podcast, that's approximately 5,500+ hours. Additionally, the show has garnered 25,000+ streams. (A stream is counted when a user has listened to at least 60 seconds of an episode). This reflects on the power that great storytelling has in positively impacting the lives of people. Relaying the success of 'beliEVE' and the demand for stories of inspirational women who challenge the status quo, the audio show is now in its second season.

Here are some testimonials of what our guests on the podcast felt after sharing their journey. "Being part of a community of stories that capture the pioneering spirit of women who dare to risk and lead." - Ritu David, Founder, The Data Duck "It was really a nice experience while interacting with the podcast believe team. It was just reviving my whole life in half an hour. It boosted me to add more and more feathers in my cap." - Poonam Beniwal, National Boxing Champion "The interview was great. I am always tongue tied in interviews. And the interviewer would always prompt. Interviews make me self-conscious so much that I lose focus on

what to say. But Ms. ElsaMarie put me at ease so much that I enjoyed the interview. Before joining the navy, I was an English casual announcer in All India Radio, Mumbai.

My program manager would say to listen to my own program to improve better and I hated my voice. Listening to my voice in this interview, I fell in love with the voice and the medium. Thank you, ElsaMarie. May your tribe increase.” - Lt Commander Rajeshwari Kori, Former Indian Naval Officer “While it is always great to interact with Elsa, her questions during the interview for her podcast made the interaction very insightful for me. The podcast has become a unique source of inspiration for lots of girls and women as it allows us to learn from the personal stories of other courageous women leaders.” - Dr. Rashmi Tiwari, Founder & Director, Aahan Tribal Foundation.



ElsaMarie D'Silva, founder and President of Red Dot Foundation Global (USA), has crowdsourced a platform called Safecity, the most extensive map on the issues of sexual violence and abuse in public spaces. She is the co-founder of the Gender Alliance, a cross-network initiative bringing together feminists. She was listed as one of BBC Hindi's 100 Women, penning articles in CNN, Huffington Post, and WIP.

THE JOURNEY TO MAKE DIFFERENCE - FROM A BANKER TO A SUCCESSFUL FARMER

Bijaya Dwibedi

26 July 2020, The Samaja

Jayanti Mohapatra is the founder of Manikstu Agro Pvt Ltd, an agribusiness company operating from the Kalahandi district. Mohapatra, who completed her education at Delhi University, quit her job as a banker in the US and relocated to Orissa to start her agro-based business.

Jayanti says farmers in the district were mainly dependent on cotton production and turned to daily wage jobs to sustain their living for the rest of the year. Jayanti's start-up now provides them farm jobs throughout the year and brings them back to agriculture. Manikstu Agro operates by integrating high-tech farming, animal husbandry and food processing. It works under two revenue streams Prakriti, the high-tech farming unit and Pragati, a state-of-the-art animal husbandry unit. Under Prakriti, they have a mango orchard of more than 1,000 plants and a drumstick orchard of 1,000 plants cultivated under 'high-density planting' or HDP methods. Under Pragati, they have a goat farm with the capacity to house 400 animals to cross-breed Totapuri with Black Bengal goats. In addition, the farm is engaged in producing organic fruits and vegetables, spices and other farm-related produce and livestock. Both Jayanti and her husband believe that the Agro revolution can maintain a food chain's balance without harming the environment.

Jayanti, the secretary of the women's wing of Odisha Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprises, understands the many challenges as an entrepreneur. However, this powerhouse of a woman can give men a run for their money in terms of mental resilience and is highly quick-witted, and her fighting spirit is helping her pave the way for a better future.

(Translated from Odia to English)



Bijaya Dwibedi has been in journalism since 1986. He presently works as a District Correspondent at The Samaj, Kalahandi, Bhawanipatna since 1992. Population First awarded him the National *Laadli* Media and Advertising Award First, Mumbai, for Best Journalist in 2019 - 2020.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

भारतीय खिलाड़ी ऑफ द ईयर: विनेश फोगाट ओलंपिक का ख़्वाब पूरा कर पाएंगी?

वंदना ढांड

3 फेब्रुअरी 2020, बीबीसी न्यूज़ हिंदी

90 के दशक के बॉलीवुड गानों की धुन पर वार्म-अप करती छोटे-छोटे बालों वाली युवा महिला खिलाड़ी। कुश्ती के दांव पेच से पहले ये पहलवान ख़ुद को तैयार कर रही थीं। लखनऊ के इनडोर स्टेडियम का ये नज़ारा अपने आप में बहुत कुछ बयां कर रहा था।

जनवरी की एक सर्द सुबह हम लखनऊ में महिला पहलवान विनेश फोगाट से मिलने पहुँचे थे। विनेश सुबह-सुबह यहाँ पूरे जोशो-खरोश से ट्रेनिंग में लगी हुई थी।

हमें देखकर वो हल्के से मुस्कुराई, हाथ हिलाया और फिर तल्लीनता से प्रैक्टिस में लग गई, कोच की एक-एक बात को ध्यान से सुनते हुए- मानो अगले मैच की हार-जीत का फैसला इसी पर टिका हुआ है। बीच में बस वो अपने पंसदीदा गाने लगाने के लिए रुकती थी- कुछ पंजाबी और कुछ हिंदी। उस दिन की थीम थी: उदास लव सॉन्स ये 25 अगस्त 1994 को हरियाणा के बलाली गाँव में जन्मी एक ऐसी महिला खिलाड़ी की कहानी है जो अपनी कड़ी मेहनत, हिम्मत, हौसले के बूते पर अब दुनिया की सबसे बेहतरीन पहलवानों में गिनी जाती है। करीब तीन घंटे की ट्रेनिंग के बाद विनेश इंटरव्यू के लिए मैट पर बैठते हुए कहती हैं कि पहलवानी करना तो उनकी किस्मत में शायद पहले से ही लिखा हुआ था। विनेश का इशारा अपने ताऊ महावीर फोगाट की ओर था।

अपने शुरुआती दिनों के बारे में विनेश ने बताया, “मेरे ताऊजी ख़ुद भी एक पहलवान थे। मेरे दादा जी भी पहलवान थे। जब हम बच्चे थे, तभी ताऊजी ने ठान लिया था घर की लड़कियों को पहलवानी सिखानी है। मैं तो सिर्फ़ छह साल की थी।” गीता और बबीता महावीर फोगाट की बेटियाँ थीं और विनेश उनकी भतीजी। ये उतना आसान नहीं था।

विनेश बताती हैं, “20 साल पहले हरियाणा के गाँव में लड़कियों को कुश्ती सिखाने के बारे में सोचा भी नहीं जा सकता था। लोगों की सोच पुरुषवादी और रूढ़िवादी थी। लोगों ने ताऊजी को बहुत भला-बुरा कहा। हम बहनों के बाल छोटे-छोटे थे, लड़कों की तरह। हम निक्कर पहनकर गाँव में प्रेक्टिस करने जाती थीं। पड़ोस की औरतें माँ से आकर बोलती थीं कि अपनी बेटी को कहो कम से कम फुल पैट पहनकर निकले। शुरू-शुरू में ये सब सुनकर माँ को भी शर्म आती थी।” बात करते-करते विनेश के चेहरे के भाव बदल जाते हैं। बात जारी रखते हुए विनेश हरियाणवी ठसक से बताती हैं, “पर मैं किसी की बात नहीं सुनती थी और पलट कर जवाब देती थी। माँ से कहती कि उन्हें कहो कि ज़्यादा दिक्कत है तो अपनी बेटियों की पहनवालों। मेरे कपड़ों पर कमेंट न करें। ताऊजी की ट्रेनिंग से हमारे अंदर ये बात घर चुकी थी कि हम किसी से कम नहीं हैं।”

जूझने और भिड़ जाने की इसी क्षमता ने विनेश को बड़े मुकाबलों में सफलता दिलवाई है लेकिन शुरुआती संघर्ष को विनेश भूली नहीं है।

वो बताती हैं, “जब बच्चे थे तो शुरू-शुरू में तो एक-दो महीने बहुत अच्छा लगा जब ताऊजी कुश्ती के लिए ले जाते। खेलना किस बच्चे को अच्छा नहीं लगता? धीरे-धीरे उन्हें लगना लगा कि इन लड़कियों में वाकई पहलवान बनने का दम है। उसके बाद हमारी कड़क वाली ट्रेनिंग शुरू हो गई। हमें सुबह साढ़े तीन बजे उठना पड़ता। ट्रेनिंग कितने घंटे चलेगी ये तय नहीं होता था। अगर आज के बच्चों को ऐसी कड़ी ट्रेनिंग करनी पड़े तो वो पहले ही दिन भाग जाएँ।”

विनेश बताती हैं, “अगर कोई गलती हुई तो ट्रेनिंग और खिंच जाती और जो ज़बरदस्त वाली मार पड़ती वो अलग। इसके बाद हम स्कूल जाते। क्लास में तो हम सोते ही थे बस। तब ज़िंदगी का मतलब था: कुश्ती करो, खाओ और चुपचाप सो जाओ बस। बाल लंबे करने तक की इजाज़त नहीं थी क्योंकि ताऊजी को लगता था कि इससे ध्यान भटकेगा। लोग उन्हें काफ़ी कुछ बोलते थे लेकिन ताऊजी की नज़र सिर्फ़ ओलंपिक मेडल पर थी।” उस वक़्त गाँव में नन्हीं विनेश को पता तक नहीं था कि आखिर ओलंपिक होता क्या है।

वो बताती हैं, “हम ट्रेनिंग से इतने तंग आ चुके थे कि हमें लगता था: भाई कौन है ये? ओलंपिक कहाँ मिलता है? कोई इनको लाकर दे दो तो हमारा पीछा छूटे। सिर्फ़ ताऊजी को ही पता था कि वो कितना आगे की सोच रहे थे।” कहते हुए विनेश के चेहरे पर मुस्कान आ जाती है। धीरे-धीरे विनेश की मेहनत और ट्रेनिंग रंग लाने लगी। वो गाँव से निकल राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर मेडल जीतने लगीं। ज़िंदगी में टर्निंग प्वाइंट तब आया जब 19 साल की उम्र में विनेश ने कॉमनवेल्थ गेम्स में गोल्ड मेडल जीता। ये अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंच पर एक नई महिला पहलवान की दस्तक थी।

हर खिलाड़ी की तरह विनेश भी यही कहती हैं कि हारना उन्हें बिल्कुल पसंद नहीं। जूझने की ये क्षमता शायद विनेश को माँ प्रेम लता से मिली है, अपनी सफलता के लिए वो ताऊ और माँ को ही श्रेय देती हैं। विनेश बहुत छोटी थीं जब उनके पिता की हत्या कर दी गई। उस समय हरियाणा के रूढ़िवादी समाज में उनकी माँ ने बतौर सिंगल मदर विनेश को पाला-पोसा। वो बताती हैं, “जब तक पिताजी ज़िंदा थे, सब कुछ ठीक था। वो मुझे खेलते देख बहुत खुश होते थे लेकिन उनकी मौत के बाद सब कुछ बदल गया। गाँव के लोग मम्मी को बोलने लगे कि बिन पिता की बेटी है, उसकी शादी करवा दो, बस। गीता-बबीता तो इसलिए खेल रही हैं क्योंकि उनके पिता हैं। गाँव में किसी को नहीं लगता था कि मैं कुछ कर पाऊँगी। लेकिन मम्मी ने साफ़ कह दिया कि मेरी बेटी खेलेगी। हालात अच्छे नहीं थे लेकिन हमें सुविधाएँ देने के लिए माँ ने बहुत संघर्ष किया।”

विनेश ने बताया, “ताऊजी की ट्रेनिंग बहुत की मुश्किल होती थी। कई बार सोचती थी, सब छोड़ दूँ लेकिन जब मम्मी को मेहनत करते हुए देखती थी तो मैंने भी अपने आप को अंदर से मजबूत करना सीख लिया।” कॉमनवेल्थ के बाद जब 2016 रियो ओलंपिक में भारतीय टीम गई तो 21 साल की विनेश से पदक पक्का माना जा रहा था लेकिन किस्मत को कुछ और ही मंज़ूर था।

क्वार्टरफ़ाइनल में अचानक विनेश को गंभीर चोट लग गई। देखते-देखते गेम बदल गया। दर्द से कराहती विनेश को स्ट्रेचर पर ले जाना पड़ा और ओलंपिक का सपना टूट गया। विनेश बताती हैं कि ये उनके करियर का सबसे मुश्किल दौर था जहाँ वो अपनी ही क्षमता पर शक करने लगी। विनेश ने बताया, “मैंने लोगों को कहते हुए सुना था कि अगर खिलाड़ी एक बार गंभीर रूप से घायल हो जाए तो समझो करियर ख़त्म। मैंने ख़ुद देखा भी था। तीन साल तक मेरी ख़ुद से लड़ाई चलती रही कि क्या मैं ओलंपिक में वापसी कर पाऊँगी।”

इंटरव्यू का मूड अचानक बदल सा जाता है। एक सेंकेड के लिए ही सही विनेश की आँख भर आती है। लेकिन इससे पहले कि आपको एहसास हो, वो ख़ुद को संभालते हुए आगे बढ़ जाती हैं- बिल्कुल अपनी गेम की तरह। जब एक सफल खिलाड़ी इस तरह के दौर से या दबाव या नाकामी से गुज़रता है तो वो ख़ुद को कैसे संभालता है? इस सवाल के जवाब में विनेश का एक अलग ही चेहरा देखने को मिला। हमेशा चुलबुली से रहने वाली विनेश ने बताया, “जब भी मुझे कोई सवाल परेशान करता है तो मैं ख़ुद से और भगवान से बात करती हूँ। तीसरा कोई नहीं। मुझे किसी से दिल की बात करना पसंद नहीं है। दरअसल मैं किसी और को अपने मन की बात समझा ही नहीं पाती। मैं अपने आप से ही सवाल पूछती हूँ और उनके जवाब भी

खुद से ही लेती हूँ। मेरे लिए यही काम करता है। सौभाग्यवश अभी तक कोई फैसला ग़लत साबित नहीं हुआ।” ख़ैर, रियो ओलंपिक के बाद सर्जरी हुई और विनेश ने अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर वापसी की। कभी सफलता मिली और कुछ नाकामियाँ भी। 2018 के एशियन गेम्स में वो गोल्ड जीतने वाली पहली भारतीय पहलवान बनीं।

कई मैच वो हारी भीं जिसके लिए लोग उनकी कमियाँ भी गिनाने लगी, ख़ासकर ये कि बड़े मैच में स्टैनिया में मार खा जाती हैं लेकिन विनेश की मेहनत, नया कोच और ट्रेनिंग की नई तकनीक की बदौलत विनेश ने जल्द ही सबको ग़लत साबित किया। वर्ल्ड चैंपियनशिप जिसमें वो हमेशा हार जाती थीं, 2019 में आखिरकर विनेश ने कांस्य पदक जीता।

आज विनेश दुनिया की चोटी की खिलाड़ी हैं। साल 2020 की शुरुआत उन्होंने रोम में गोल्ड मेडल जीतकर की है। कड़ी ट्रेनिंग और कुश्ती के दांव पेंच के बीच एक और व्यक्ति है जो विनेश के साथ कंधे से कंधा मिलाकर खड़ा रहा है-सोमवीर राठी। सोमवीर खुद भी एक पहलवान हैं और विनेश को आठ साल से ज़्यादा से जानते हैं। कुश्ती के दंगलों के बीच दोनों के बीच मोहब्बत भी परवान चढ़ने लगी थी। सोमवीर के बारे में विनेश कहती, “मेरे करियर के लिए उसने अपना करियर का नुक़सान किया है। एक वो ही है जो बिना कुछ कहे मेरे दिल की बात समझ सकता है।”

2018 में एशियन गेम्स से गोल्ड जीतने के बाद जब विनेश लौटीं, एयरपोर्ट पर ही सोमवीर ने प्रपोज़ किया और कुछ महीनों के अंदर दोनों की शादी भी हो गई। कुश्ती दोनों का जुनून है। वैसे कुश्ती से परे अगर कभी समय मिलता है तो विनेश म्यूज़िक सुनना और फ़िल्में देखना पसंद करती हैं। हालांकि वो बताती हैं कि पिछले कुछ सालों में वो चंद ही फ़िल्में देख पाई हैं जिसमें उन्हें ‘बाहुबली’, ‘चक दे’ और ‘अपने’ अच्छी लगी।

फ़िल्म स्टार्स में वो रणवीर सिंह, अक्षय कुमार, कंगना और दीपिका की फ़ैन हैं। विनेश का एक और बड़ा शौक़ है- खाना। वो ख़द की फूडी बताती हैं। वो कहती हैं, “मरने से पहले मैं हर मुमकिन खाना टेस्ट करना चाहती हूँ। मेरे सपनों में से एक सपना है कि मैं पूरी दुनिया घूमूँ और हर तरह के व्यंजन खा डालूँ।” अपने ऊपर खुद ही ज़ोर-जोर से हँसती विनेश बोलती चली जाती हैं।

तो लजीज़ खाना विनेश को ख़ुश करने का बढ़िया तरीका है लेकिन क्या इस पहलवान को गुस्सा भी आता है? ख़ुराफ़ाती मुस्कान के साथ विनेश कहती हैं, “मुझे बहुत गुस्सा आता है।

और जब गुस्सा आता है तो मैं तोड़ फोड़ भी कर सकती हूँ।” बचपन में तो विनेश को बाल बड़े करने का मौका नहीं मिला तो वो अब अपना शौक पूरा कर रही है।

विनेश के पास किस्सों का खजाना है। एक किस्सा सुनाते हुए विनेश बताती हैं, “नेशनल कैप में एक बार लंबा वक्रत रह गई तो बाल बड़े हो गए। घर आई तो ताऊजी बोले, बुलाओ नाई। मैं घर की अलमारी में छिप गई और मम्मी ने उसे बाहर से बंद कर दिया।” विनेश अपने कई शौक और सपने पूरे कर चुकी हैं। अब विनेश का सबसे बड़ा सपना क्या है?

बिना पलक झपके विनेश तपाक से जवाब देती है, “बहुत कम लोगों को ज़िंदगी में दूसरा मौका मिलता है। मुझे दूसरा मौका मिला है ओलंपिक में खेलने का। मैं ओलंपिक मेडल जीतने का अपना सपना पूरा करना चाहती हूँ।” कहते-कहते जैसे वो अपने ही खयालों में खो गई। अब हमारा इंटरव्यू उस मकाम पर पहुँच चुकी था जहाँ लगा मानो किसी फ़िल्म का क्लाइमेक्स आ गया हो। और यहाँ से आगे फ़िल्म ‘द एंड’ ही हो सकती है। विनेश का फ़िलहाल एक ही लक्ष्य है- टोक्यो 2020, 2016 के अधूरे सपने को मुकम्मल करना।



Vandana Dhand is a multimedia journalist with an experience of over 20 years in different roles across TV, digital and radio. One of her thrust areas is gender-based news stories and features. She has worked with BBC English, Hindi and Urdu at various levels. She was a recipient of the *Laadli* award in 2015-16.

ANTI - CAA PROTESTS: HOW PROTEST POLITICS ACQUIRED A FEMINIST UNDERTONE

Zeba Warsi

8 March 2020, CNN News18

As Indian Muslim women gathered at frontlines of anti-CAA protests, through this report we find out how this newfound sense of purpose & identity will impact gender equations.

These steps women protesters were taking every day, have become symbolic of the journey many Indian Muslim women have embarked on, since the anti-CAA protests began. For almost all of them this is the first such experience they have had. Like most other Indian and Indian Muslim women, they have been confined to traditional gender roles at best and discriminated against or oppressed at worst. In this story, we document how these little acts of political assertion on behalf of secular Indian Muslims have also become acts of feminism for the women.

The Shaheen Bagh protests have been covered extensively, but in this report, we look at them solely through a gender lens. On how these protests have given a new identity to women and stand to change pre-defined gender roles.



Zeba Warsi is a broadcast journalist with over seven years of experience covering gender, social justice and human rights issues. She is a recipient of the 2019 Red Ink Award and ENBA awards 2020.

FIRST ROHINGYA REFUGEE GOES TO UNIVERSITY IN INDIA

TRT World

21 October 2020

TRT World's video titled 'First Rohingya Woman to Get into an Indian University' highlights 21-year-old Tasmida Johar's journey from a refugee to a student. She is studying for a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Delhi University, making her one of the few refugees pursuing university studies anywhere in the world. She requests the world to treat refugees as any other human being with feelings & emotions. Education is an essential part of development. The refugees should not be discriminated against and given equal opportunities as others.

My name is Tasmida Johar and I am a Rohingya refugee. Since 2012 I've been in India. We had left Myanmar in 2005 as the military and Burmese (Myanmarese) government were committing atrocities against Rohingya Muslims. Rohingya children aren't allowed to study in Myanmar. Even if allowed to study, they can only do so up to the 10th standard. And even, if you achieve that you will not get a job, the government will not support you. Of the forty thousand Rohingya refugees in India, I am the first one to go to university. While I am happy for myself, I also feel sad that why am I the first one? There are so many refugees who came here before I did, why didn't they succeed? We have a very few doctors in our community. There are some male doctors, but I've never come across a female doctor. So ever since I was child, I thought of becoming a doctor so that I can work for the women and children of my community. But once I couldn't get admission in the science stream, I gave up on that dream. Seeing the plight of my country, I changed my goal. Even if I can't be a doctor, I can't stop, and I thought of becoming a lawyer. I applied for a law degree at Jamia Milia Islamia University in New Delhi. I even got selected. But I was not given admission to study law since I'm a Rohingya refugee and have come in from another country. I did not give up and got admission in Delhi University where I am studying for a bachelor's degree in Political Science. When people call us refugees, I sometimes feel dehumanized. We are also human beings, we have feelings too. We are just like anybody else. When we are called refugees, we are made to feel that we don't belong anywhere. I was really young when I left my

hometown. We had to cross two international borders to get to safety. It was a close call with death and a hard journey. To go from one country to another, understand the culture there and learn how to live with the people is quite tough. But we have accepted all that and people have also accepted us and that's why we have been able to reach here. There are many who have helped us, a lot of families who came forward. If as a refugee I can achieve this, imagine what people living in their own countries can achieve. The message here is that there will be tough times in life, but those who want to do something, will do it anyhow. Earlier when I used to go to attend classes, my classmates would talk down to me and taunt me saying, "You could not do anything in Burma (Myanmar), what will you do here?"

Education is the most important tool for every individual, especially for refugees. We were not educated and did not have knowledge and that is why we were forced out of our country. If you deny a child education, you are ruining her life, destroying her future. Education is the only means through which we can achieve our goals. Apart from my identity as a refugee, I am a woman too. This is very tough. In my country many women were raped and killed. But because of the help of many people and support of my family I have been able to reach here. My request to everybody is to give other refugees a chance too. They also have a lot of talent but do not get the opportunity.



TRT World is a state owned Turkish news channel which broadcasts in English 24 hours a day. The channel is operated by the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation and is based in Istanbul.





NATIONAL AWARDS

BOOKS

Autobiography

Queeristan

Parmesh Shahani

Queeristan, is an in-depth study of the LGBTQAI community as it explores the societal prejudice against it and its marginalization. It also foresees the effect of the group's integration into the corporate world through the institution of sensitive and inclusive policies. It also urges corporate strategists to create greater representation for the community in their communications and marketing. The book also lays down pointers for people to overcome homophobia, trans, and biphobia as it looks at the intersectionality of caste, religion, and sexual orientation with the societal construct.



Memoir

The Water Phoenix

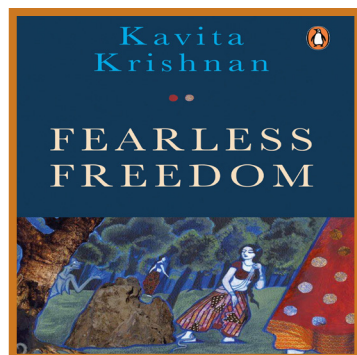
Rituparna Chatterjee

The Water Phoenix is an extraordinary exposition of the journey of a child who was sexually abused several times through her childhood, and her sense of abandonment following the loss of her mother and her father's constant transfers. It portrays the trauma the young girl goes through, her subsequent questioning of self as she grows up in an echo chamber of self-doubt, and her catharsis as she rejects the accepted norms to rise through the morass and emerge a healed person.



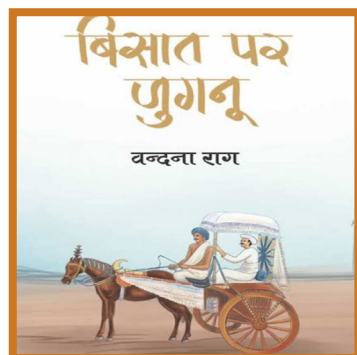
Non-Fiction
Fearless Freedom
Kavita Krishnan

'If you want to be safe, why do you want freedom', as the opening remark, sets the stage of this seminal work by Kavita Krishnan. Fearless Freedom looks at a range of issues as it juxtaposes the commonly held norms of safety with what true personal freedom means for a woman. In India, safekeeping for women is often equated with their autonomy being curtailed as they are placed under constant surveillance of a watchful eye. The book challenges the patriarchal standards that clutch society and highlights the personal and political repercussions of erasing women from public spaces and keeping them confined to what is traditionally deemed a safe space.



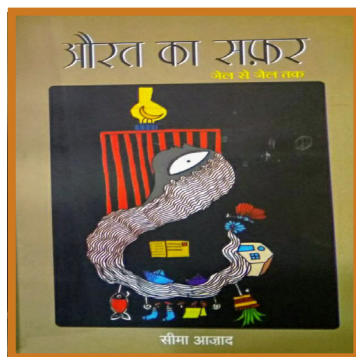
Hindi | Fiction
Bisaat Par Jugnu
Vandana Rag

Published by Rajkamal Prakashan, Bisaat Per Jugnu, portrays the stories of women from two distinct countries with a similar background of coming out of war and fighting the tyranny of the colonist powers, India in the backdrop of 1857 and China in the aftermath of the two Opium Wars. The story captures the travails of common women from Patna to Delhi and the Canton region of China, and who have chosen to jump into the conflict.



Hindi | Non-Fiction
Aurat Ka Safar - Jail se Jail Tak
Seema Azad

Seema Azad's book "Aurat Ka Safar - Jail se Jail Tak" looks at the lives of 27 incarcerated women who have been victims of barbaric patriarchy and casteism. She noted their stories during her own term in the Naini Central Jail. She looks at their living conditions, the status of justice being accorded to them, and their personal circumstances that led to their present state. A human rights activist, she studied their social background and looks at what lies ahead for them, as they step from a smaller jail to what could be a larger jail for these women.



THEATRE

Nadira Babbar
Ji Jaisi Aapki Marzi

Nadira Babbar, through her over three-decade-long career in theatre has produced some remarkable work that highlights the social issues facing society. Through her theatre group, Ekjute, she has experimented with style, themes, and techniques liberally to create powerful works that have left a lasting impression. Ji Jaisi Aapki Marzi, written by Nadira Babbar looks at the lives of four different female protagonists and examines various roles assigned to women in our societies as well as the overt and covert bias that exists against them. The blood-curdling violence that gets socially sanctioned leaves the viewers shocked and disturbed for long.



LAADLI MOST INSPIRING WOMAN PROTAGONIST IN A TV SERIAL

Garima Ruhail and Susheela Ruhail
Kaatelal & Sons
Sony SAB

A feisty pair of twins, Garima Ruhail and Susheela Ruhail, Kaatelal & Sons, Sony SAB, fight against patriarchal traditions to run the family's ancestral salon called Kaatelal & Sons in Rohtak, Haryana. They successfully change society's perception about what girls can do and eventually the salon was renamed Kaatelal & Daughters.

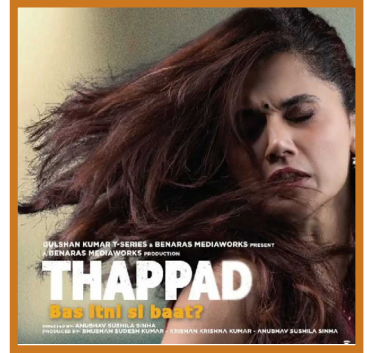
Kaatelal & Sons, the serial that premiered on Sony SAB is set in a misogynistic Haryanvi backdrop. The sisters Garima is portrayed by Megha Chakraborty while Jiya Shankar essays Susheela's part.



FILMS

Feature Film - Thappad Anubhav Sinha

The film raises the issues of domestic violence and its psychological impact on the woman. It also lays bare the societal patriarchal mindset where it is "Ok" for the husband to abuse the wife but the onus of making the marriage work still rests on the woman. Whether it is her sacrificing her dreams at the altar of her husband's ambitions or kowtowing to the parental the woman has to be the one to mend, maintain and make the relationships work. Through Amrita's journey, the film explores the common practice of relegating a woman to secondary status while the man is naturally given the privilege to forge ahead with his dreams expecting the woman to support him unflinchingly.



OTT Release – Amazon Prime The Great Indian Kitchen - Jeo Baby

The Great Indian Kitchen traces the story of a Malayalee girl raised in Bahrain and a trained dancer. She gets married into a traditional and orthodox family in Kerala. The narrative takes the viewer through her married life as she grapples with the patriarchal and regressive mindset of her in-laws and husband. She eventually moves out of this conjugation to craft a life as a successful dancer. The film exposes the everyday lived-in reality of women, stuck in the rut of everyday drudgery and care work with no recognition, no choice, and no freedom.

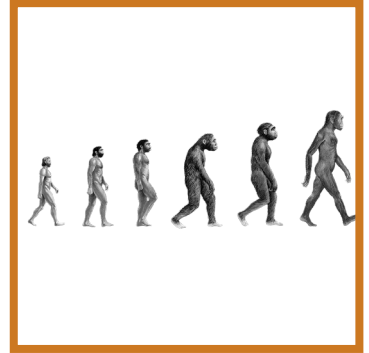


ADVERTISEMENTS

Grand Prix - Animal

Pure As Love | Bhima Jewellery | Product

The film traces the journey of a trans-woman and her family. Her transformation from a shy young adult to a confident young bride is liberally strewn with subtle yet powerful demonstrations of the family's warmth and understanding about her choice to be who she chooses to be. A gift of a pair of anklets, a warm look of encouragement, or a simple bonhomie when she is being escorted on her wedding day, make for an evocative statement of empowerment and not judgment or discrimination based on gender.



Leo Brunett

CSR | Whisper India | Whisper keep girls in school

The film highlights the predicament of over two crore girls who stay away from school and the efforts of Whisper, a feminine care brand to address the issue. The ad raises awareness about how girls in India tend to drop out of school after menarche. Lack of knowledge about period hygiene and appropriate practices, and also little understanding about the normal bodily processes forces them to stay at home rather than face the shame at school.



FCB India

Product | Tum Kab Itne Bade Ho Gaye |
Horlicks

The film truly challenges the gendered norms about girls being helpless. Stuck in the middle of a road with a flat tyre, the young female protagonist steps up to change the wheel and deftly takes the spare tyre out and fixes it, much to her mother's surprise. The neat and brisk narrative, shows the stressed mother coming out of her discomposure, and acknowledging her young daughter's prowess.

The logo for FCB India, featuring the letters 'FCB' in a multi-colored font (blue, orange, green, red) followed by 'INDIA' in a black, sans-serif font. The entire logo is enclosed within a thin orange rectangular border.

Ogilvy India

PSA | Savlon | #nohandunwashed
#Global Handwashing Day

Released on the Global Handwash Day 2020, the film features Swapna Augustine, a foot artist from the Mouth and Foot Painters (MFPA) Association. The camera follows her as she goes through her day, fixing a cup of tea for herself, switching on the lights, talking on the phone, or her effortless painting, all using her foot. The film eventually shows her washing her feet diligently before eating her food. In a society where women are considered a burden, this film about a specially-abled female artist and her unassuming and cheerful demeanour is a welcome change, and an eye-opener.

The Ogilvy logo, featuring the word 'Ogilvy' in a red, serif font. The entire logo is enclosed within a thin orange rectangular border.

Runners Up - Ogilvy India
Brand | #StopTheBeautyTest | Dove

#StopTheBeautyTest features four young women sharing their real-life stories of the test of beauty they were subjected to, in an arranged marriage setting. It looks at five key beauty prejudices i.e., height, weight, complexion, hair type, and even birthmarks, and captures their emotions as they are rejected for not conforming to typical beauty norms. The film challenges the beauty standards and questions the stigma against those who do not conform to those standards.



Runners Up – Lintas C:EX
Product | #iammytype | SkinKraft

The film talks about bespoke skincare and haircare solutions for women as opposed to mass-produced one size fits all. In doing so, it questions the stereotypical boxes that women have typically been put into and celebrates their distinct personalities, sets of religious beliefs, habits, lifestyles, philosophies, political instincts, and professions.



Runners Up – Taproot Dentsu
PSA on Sexual Harassment | Nip In The Bud |
iDIVA

The ad marks the third anniversary of the #MeToo movement by urging women to break their silence and speak about sexual harassment. It follows a young female architect as she goes to meet a middle-aged architect in his office. As the meeting progresses, he begins to intrude into her personal space. She eventually catches up to his antics and leaves. Her social media post about the man catches her mother's attention who recalls him abusing her years ago. The film urges women to not keep abuse under wraps but talk openly to thwart such predatory instincts of abusers who may otherwise continue unabated.



Runners Up - Benshi Films
PSA by Government | #Anti-Dowry | Kerala
State Film Development Corporation

The film shows a young woman effectively putting a presumptuous suitor in place as he questions her archaic choices and pushes her to get more modern and expensive jewelry. Meanwhile, her parents counter the demand for a lavish wedding from his parents by asking them to share the expenses equally. The film explores the concept of modernity as it questions the transactional nature of marriage and urges parents to not let anyone treat their daughters unjustly and raise their voices for equality.



Special Mention - Dentsu Impact India
A Social Experiment | The Divide | Paytm

The film captures a social experiment conducted amongst a cross-section of men and women in an effort to gauge financial decision-making among men and women. Through a series of questions, the experiment shows the wide gap between the two genders when it comes to financial literacy. It also reveals that while women may be in positions of power in their workplace when it comes to making financial decisions, they still hold on to the traditional dependence on their men.

dentsu

DENTSU IMPACT



SPECIAL AWARDS

LAADLI OF THE CENTURY AWARD

SHAMA ZAIDI

In an industry that has largely been dominated by men, Shama Zaidi has been a path breaker. Multifaceted with wide-ranging contributions across theatre, cinema and journalism, she has an illustrious career spanning nearly five decades.



Shama ji has been a trailblazer and has set an example for the younger generation of filmmakers through her vast body of work with stalwarts such as Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal, and M.S. Sathyu.

She has developed screenplay, designed costumes, or been an art director for highly acclaimed films like Garam Hawa, Charandas Chor, Zubeida, Mandi, Hari Bhari, Mammo, Nishant, Manthan, Shatranj Ke Khiladi, and many more.

Each of her projects will be remembered for showcasing the social reality of the times, and speaks of her undeniable contribution as well as underpins her talent for detail-oriented research.

LAADLI LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

DR. NEELAM MANSINGH

Padma Shri Dr. Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry is a globally acclaimed theatre personality and is a Professor Emeritus at Punjab University. She was bestowed with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in Theatre Direction in 2003.



Her well-known plays include Kitchen Katha, The Suit, Yerma, Nagamandala, The Mad Woman of Chaillot, Little Eyolf, Bitter Fruit, Naked Voices, Stree Patra and Gumm Hai.

Through a journey of nearly 30 years, Neelam ji has experimented with formats, structure, space, narration as well as characters, freely, to interpret each production differently.

“Vision is not static and it constantly evolves” and “The more you see, the bigger is the world of the self you enter” is what she believes in and it reflects in the way she deconstructs and interprets each of her oeuvres.

LAADLI GENDER CHAMPION AWARD

FLAVIA AGNES

Flavia Agnes is a women's rights lawyer with expertise in marital, divorce, and property law. She is a practicing lawyer in Mumbai High Court since 1988.

She also advises the government on law implementation and currently advises the Ministry of Women and Child Development in Maharashtra.

In 1990, she co-founded MAJLIS, a legal and cultural resource centre that campaigns for and has so far provided more than 50,000 women, legal representation on issues of matrimonial rights, child custody, and more. She is a part of the Global Feminisms Project, an archive created in 2002 to explore women scholars and activists around the world.

A prolific writer and author, her articles have appeared in leading journals like Subaltern Studies, Economic and Political Weekly, and Manushi. Her **books include My Story, Our Story, Family Law, Law, and Gender Inequality, Negotiating Spaces, and more.**

"We all have a stereotypical view of who the victims of domestic violence are; 'oh it is happening out there, maybe in slums.' We never imagine that it can happen in middle-class homes. I am a survivor and through this organization, I want to help those undergoing domestic violence, to come out of it and become survivors." It is this spirit of Flavia Agnes we salute as we recognize her tremendous contribution through the first *LAADLI* Gender Champion Award, instituted in the memory of Gail Omvedt, Kamala Bhasin, and Sonal Shukla.



LAADLI WOMEN BEHIND THE SCREEN

TANUJA CHANDRA

Women are visible on the screen and their contribution to the film industry is well recognized. Unfortunately, their participation and visibility in other fields of filmmaking, production, direction, cinematography, music direction, etc, has been feeble. Today we have many women entering the film industry in various departments and are making a name for themselves. The *Laadli* Woman Behind the Screen Award acknowledges such women. This year's award goes to Tanuja Chandra.



Tanuja Chandra is a well-known film director and writer known for her women-centric films. She started her directorial debut with *Dushman* which looks at the psychological trauma of a young girl who lost her twin to a brutal murder following her rape. Her next film *Sangharsh* also was centered around a female protagonist who tracks down a deadly criminal. Her other films include *Sur – The Melody of Life*, *Film Star*, *Zakhm*, *Zindaggi Rocks*, *Qarib Qarib Single* and *Hope* and a Little Sugar, *Silvat*, a short film and a documentary *Aunty Sudha* *Aunty Radha*, that talks about sisterhood in a rural setting.

She has directed television serials like *Zameen Aasman* and *Mumkin*. She co-wrote the screenplay of Yash Chopra's hugely successful film *Dil To Pagal hai* and Mahesh Bhatt's *Tamanna*.

Multi-faceted, she has extended her footprint into journalism as she contributes articles and columns to several leading publications such as the *Indian Express*. She has recently authored a book that is replete with quirky, strange, funny and intriguing tales from small-towns in Uttar Pradesh.

OUR JURY

1. **AMMU JOSEPH** - Independent journalist and author, a key contributor to several global research and monitoring projects.

2. **ANAND MADHAB** - Former CEO of Jagran Pehle, former Principal Consultant, Gender Resource Centre, Department of Social Welfare, Government of Bihar.

3. **ANUJA GULATI** - Program Management Specialist, UNFPA.

4. **ANURADHA BHASIN** - Internationally published journalist, author, Executive Editor, Kashmir Times, Commonwealth Fellow 2016, peace activist.

5. **ANURADHA RAJAN** - Executive Director of South Asia Women Foundation India (SAWF IN), feminist, monitoring and evaluation professional.

6. **ANURADHA SENGUPTA** - Author, media professional, Consulting Editor at Outlook Publishing (India) Pvt. Ltd.

7. **Dr. ARATHI PM** - Assistant Professor at the School of Indian Legal Thought, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala.

8. **ASIYA SHERWANI** - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Organizational Ethics Advisor & Consultant.

9. **DIVYA JAIN** - Multilingual independent journalist, feminist, and former editor of Antarang Sangini.

10. **Dr. DAYA KRISHNA MANGAL** - Professor of Public Health and Dean Research at IIHMR University, Jaipur.

11. **DOLLY THAKORE** - Television newscaster, columnist, author, editor, casting director, and theatre actor.

12. Dr. GAURANG JANI - Ex-faculty at the Sociology Department of Gujarat University.

13. Dr. GITA CHADHA - Teaches Sociology at Mumbai University has developed frameworks for feminist archiving at Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University, Mumbai.

14. GITALI VINAYAK - Chief Editor, Miloon Saryajani, a Marathi magazine and a social activist.

15. GOKUL KRISHNAMOORTHY - Founder and Curator, www.cluttercutter.in, Founding Editor, EVENTFAQS Media, columnist.

16. GOVIND CHATURVEDI - A veteran journalist was associated with Dainik Navjyoti, UNI, and Rajasthan Patrika and more.

17. INDU CAPOOR - Founder-Director of Centre for Health, Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA).

18. JEROO MULLA - Faculty member at Social Communications at Sophia Polytechnic and Symbiosis, Pune. Researcher, film critic.

19. JYOTSNA KAUR HABIBULLAH - Social entrepreneur, philanthropist. Associated with FICCI FLO Kanpur Chapter as Member, National Governing Body on Women Empowerment.

20. Prof. K.G. SURESH - Vice-Chancellor, Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism & Communication, Bhopal.

21. Dr. KALPANA APTE - CEO of the Family Planning Association of India (FPA India).

22. KANKSSHI AGARWAL - Founder of NETRI Foundation, India's first incubator for women in politics.

23. KIRAN MANRAL - An author, TEDx speaker, columnist and mentor, journalist, researcher, festival curator and entrepreneur.

24. **KONDAVEETI SATYAVATI** - Women's rights activist and founder Editor of the first feminist magazine in Andhra Pradesh – 'Streevada Patrika' – Bhumika in 1993.

25. **KUMAR KETKAR** - Former Editor of Loksatta, and a political analyst, currently a Rajya Sabha MP, Padma Shri Awardee.

26. **LOGANAYAKI RAMACHANDRAN** - Writer, journalist, editor, social worker and relationship counsellor. Former Editor of 'Snehidhi' – a leading Tamil bi-weekly for women.

27. **MADHAVI KUCKREJA** - Women's rights activist, founder of Vanangana and Sanatkada.

28. **MALTI MEHTA** - Teaches Mass Communication, Communication Skills, Development Communication, and Film production.

29. **MANDIRA SEN** - Partner, Bhatkal and Sen, which publishes two imprints SAGE-STREE and SAGE SAMYA.

30. **MANJIRA MAJUMDAR** - Journalist, author, currently engaged in media advocacy.

31. **MEENA KARNIK** - Senior journalist, film critic, author, translator. Co-editor Akshar, author of 'Gautam'.

32. **MEGHA TATA** - President, International Advertising Association (IAA), Managing Director, Discovery Communications India.

33. **MEGHNA GHAI PURI** - Educationist, mentor, change catalyst. President, Whistling Woods International.

34. **MOHAMMED KHAN** - Doyen of Indian advertising who set up Contract and Rediffusion, as well as Enterprise Nexus.

35. **NILAKSHI SENGUPTA** - Director, producer, a writer with experience in advertising and corporate content creation.

36. **OM KATARE** - Actor, director and playwright. President, Yatri Theatre Association, Mumbai.

37. **PIYUSH JHA** - Film director, screenwriter, OTT show creator and the author of crime-fiction novels.

38. **PREETA MATHUR** - Head, of Ank Theatre Group, a podcaster and media contributor on theatre.

39. **PRASHANT DIXIT** - Group Editor, Lokmat.

40. **QUASAR THAKORE PADAMSEE** - Artistic Director of theatre & arts management company, QTP.

41. **RAJAN MAHAN** - Professor of Journalism at the University of Rajasthan and a veteran journalist with NDTV.

42. **RAJAT RAY** - Social innovations consultant. Was the Senior Advocacy Officer at UNFPA.

43. **RAJENDRA TIWARI** - Writer & commentator. Has worked with Prabhat Khabar, Dainik Jagran, Dainik Bhaskar, Hindustan and Amar Ujala.

44. **RANJANA DAS** - Lead Specialist-Private Sector Engagement in Oxfam India.

45. **RANJONA BANERJEE** - Independent journalist, currently a Consulting Editor with MxMIndia.com.

46. **REEMA GEHI DESAI** - Arts Journalist, researcher and theatre enthusiast who has worked with leading theatre groups in India and the UK.

47. **RUPA MEHTA** - Producer at Doordarshan (Prasar Bharati) and retired Assistant Director Doordarshan Kendra, Ahmedabad.

48. **SAJAYA KAKARLA** - Independent journalist, columnist, social analyst, translator, documentary filmmaker and feminist activist.

49. **SAMPAD MAHAPATRA** - Former Editor of 'The Sambad' and Founder Editor of 'The Nitidin', former Odisha Bureau Chief of NDTV.

50. **SANDEEP SAHU** - Multilingual journalist associated with the BBC World Service from Odisha, OTV, the 'Outlook' magazine, thequint.com, news18.com and others.

51. **SANTOSH DESAI** - MD & CEO, Futurebrands, columnist, media critic, and author.

52. **SATHYA SARAN** - Author, teacher, Consulting Editor with Penguin Random House India, former Editor of Femina.

53. **SATYAVATI MAURYA** - Veteran Hindi journalist associated with Meri Saheli, Arogya Sanjivani, Roop Nihar, Sahitya Abha and more.

54. **SAUMYA BAIJAL** - Feminist, bilingual writer, ad woman, storyteller, poet, guest lecturer, radio presenter, theatre person & activist.

55. **SAYED RAZA HUSSAIN ZAIDI** - A gender trainer, queer feminist, and Co-founder of Aazaadi International.

56. **SHAHINA K. K.** - Associate Editor of the news portal 'The Federal'.

57. **SHARAD PRADHAN** - Veteran independent journalist, political analyst, author. Editor, TheFreePress - digital news channel, and a contributor to several leading print, electronic and digital media.

58. **SHEFALI CHATURVEDI** - Broadcaster, documentary filmmaker Consultant Executive Producer BBC Media Action, India.

59. **Dr. SHOMA A. CHATTERJI** - Independent journalist, author, film scholar, and veteran film critic. She has authored 26 books of which eight are on gender issues.

60. **SMRITI NEVATIA** - Curator, selector and jury member for national and international film festivals, documentary scripting and teaching, writer-researcher on gender and sexuality.

61. **SUDHA ARORA** - A feminist writer in Hindi, Lecturer, editor, playwright, and scriptwriter.

62. **SUDHIR MISHRA** - Senior journalist, currently Senior Editor in Navbharat Times handling Lucknow & NCR units.

63. **SUJATA MADHOK** - A development journalist and social activist, General Secretary of the Delhi Union of Journalists and the Chair of its Gender Council.

64. **SUNIL JHA** - Multilingual senior journalist associated with ABP News, UNI, TV Today and many more.

65. **SUNEETA RAO** - Indipop artist, performer, theatre artist.

66. **SUREKHA SHENOY** - CAO and Chief of Staff for TIAA G6BS India. Corporate leader, philanthropist and mentor.

67. **SWATI SONI** - Editorial Head-Tellychakkar(TC). TC is one of the premium portals known for covering television news, celebrities and interviews.

68. **TULSIDAS BHOITE** - Founding Editor, Muktpeeth. He was associated with MI Marathi, TV9 Marathi and other channels.

69. **URVASHI BUTALIA** - Indian feminist, journalist, publisher, teacher, and consultant for Oxfam India.

70. **Dr. VASANTHI RAO** - Director General of Centre for Media Studies, member of ASCi and committees on media, gender, children and conservation.

71. **VIJAY SAHI** - Media professional associated with the Times of India. He is Chief Advisor at Sarthak Foundation, Lucknow.

72. **VINTA NANDA** - Filmmaker and writer. Editor of The Daily Eye, Creative Director at ACEE.

73. VINAYAK PATRUDKAR - Veteran journalist, Executive Editor of Pudhari.

74. VISHWANATH SACHDEV - Author, a senior columnist and former Editor of Navbharat Times.

75. Dr. YAMINI DAND SHAH - Curator of Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, editor and poet, author, literary catalyst.

About Population First

Population First is a 'Not For Profit' organization registered in March 2002 under the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950. Our key objective is to work towards gender sensitive and social development oriented health and population programmes.

We promote gender sensitivity and gender equality through:

- Awareness programmes on gender, health, population and social development issues
- Mobilising community participation in population, health and social development programmes
- Building Public Private Partnerships for programme and policy development and implementation
- Working with influencers in media and advertising to change mindsets related to girls and women's rights and gender equality.

LAADLI

Laadli works with various stakeholder groups to change the mindset that undervalues the girl child and makes her unwanted in millions of Indian homes. Through our advocacy and communications campaign we try to address the gender discrimination and inequality between the sexes. We work with the youth and media at large to question the deep-rooted son preference in our society and change the gendered mindsets.

The *laadli* media advocacy initiatives focus on promoting gender sensitivity in media and advertising by organizing innovative training programmes, campaigns and workshops, engaging media and advertising industry leaders in consultations and presenting awards to gender sensitive reporting and advertising.

LAADLI MEDIA AWARDS

The *Laadli* Media Awards for Gender Sensitivity is the only one of its kind in the world given exclusively for promoting gender sensitivity in the media and advertising. It is a year-long advocacy initiative with senior editors, media leaders, journalists, and cultural icons that culminates in the awards functions. The objective of The *Laadli* Media Awards is to draw the attention of the public to the positive efforts in the media with regard to gender sensitive reportage and provide a platform for showcasing such efforts. It does not focus on visible achievers but on media persons who are reporting from the field level- analyzing laws, policies, programmes, events and incidents using a gender lens. By acknowledging and felicitating the media persons who are writing positive stories on gender we hope to encourage more people to join the movement.

UNFPA's mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled, ensuring rights and choices for all.

Our work is guided by the principles of a human-rights based approach set in place by the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), gender empowerment and equality, and the imperative that no one is left behind.

UNFPA has been operating in India since 1974. The India Country Office collaborates extensively with a range of stakeholders such as the government (centre and state), civil society, private sector, academia, the medical community, media, judiciary, and most importantly, communities. The India Country Programme 9 focuses on empowering young people with critical life skills and invests in adolescent health and well-being; ensuring universal access to high quality sexual and reproductive health and rights; addressing gender discrimination and harmful practices such as gender-biased sex selection and child marriage, and using population data to maximise the demographic dividend.

UNFPA works closely with the Government of India in order to respond to India's national priorities articulated by the National Institution for Transforming India. Key priorities include achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the unfinished agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The main focus of the programme is to support national efforts in achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to promote gender equality.

Chrysalis Services

Chrysalis Services is a consulting firm focused on transforming the Social Sector in India. They partner with Trusts / Foundations / NGOs and other not-for-profit organizations to help them improve their efficiencies in their chosen sector, thereby significantly enhancing their overall impact. In addition, Chrysalis partners with Corporates / Philanthropists to help them run their programs/ projects end to end efficiently. They connect independent agencies involved in handling Social Media Communication and Digital Marketing, in Due Diligence, Accreditation, Social impact audits, etc., to NGOs and Corporates alike and assist in running programs/projects professionally.

There is comfort in sticking to the stereotypes and widely accepted norms, be it in our day to day living or in our writing. Moving beyond the comfort of the familiar and accepted takes courage and conviction. If we look around with an open mind, we are bound to find a gender angle behind every story, as men and women get impacted differently by patriarchy and their own gender identities.

This compilation of award-winning entries from the 11th round of the *Laadli* Media and Advertising Awards 2021 provides us with the flipside of the social reality, exposing the fissures in the society, the inherent gender biases and the deep-seated misogyny and patriarchy, and looks at the world through the eyes of women and other marginalized groups.

The stories represent different formats- articles, features, editorials, blogs etc written for print, electronic and web media. The articles cover a wide range of topics from across the nation reflecting the diverse socio-economic strata of the country.

Dr. A. L. Sharada has been active in the developmental sector for the last 35 years as a teacher, researcher, trainer and programme manager. She is the Director of Population First and was on the faculty of the Central University of Hyderabad and Indian Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur. She believes that change starts when we take the first step to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of people around us.



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