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## **Editors' Note**

It is with a lot of succinct pleasure and sense of fulfilment that we bring out this issue of our backlog laden journal, much to the confoundedly prolonged wait of our contributors, to which we express our gratitude for their contributions and patience at the very outset.

This edition focusses upon an amalgamation of issues that have caught the imagination of our authors, who range from researchers and educationists to field level practitioners; thus highlighting the changing emphasis on social work as a generic discipline.

It opens up this issue by trying to stir the philosophical imaginations of the reader. It then goes on to discuss about deprivation related issues which is embedded in the philosophy of social work by presenting the significance of early childhood education on the marginalised communities. Other discussions relate to the social exclusion of transgenders and how parents' education and their own positive attitude towards the gender variant person significantly impacts the latter's educational attainment.

Further discussions revolve around how marginalised communities such as artisan families, and especially the womenfolk among them, have been affected by occupational change. It also includes an interesting discussion about the gradual displacement of fisherfolks, namely, the Kolis, of Maharashtra. The paper on the urban poor of far-flung Mizoram lends another distinct flavour to this issue. It is followed by yet another discussion based in Mizoram, on the trends and theoretical as well as sociological underpinnings of research that has been carried out so far by the Department of Social Work in Mizoram University. Finally it is rounded up very aptly with a detailed work on the social history of Manipuri women and how their lives are interspersed with public acclaim of their bravados, but yet continue to live in the shadows of their male counterparts.

Thus, in essence, this issue has lived by the major intrinsic values of social work, namely, human dignity, service to humanity, and social justice, by trying to ensure that it speaks out for those living on the margins; with the ultimate hope of achieving the overarching goal of empowerment.

We end with a note of thanks to all the reviewers, advisory board members, editorial board members, and of course, to our parent Institution, Assam University, Silchar, for having given us limitless boundaries to pursue our endeavours in promoting the field of social work.

**Dr. Ratna Huirem**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Social Work  
Assam University, Silchar

**Dr. Kathiresan Loganathan**  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Social Work  
Assam University, Silchar

# THEORIZING FROM PRACTICE: CRITICAL REFLECTION AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

**KATHIRESAN LOGANATHAN**

*Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Assam*

*Social Work as an applied discipline aims to 'help people to help themselves'. Its knowledge base originates and thrives on western theories, perspectives, models and dimensions of various other disciplines, which is applied within the vast realms of social work practice. Theories of social work are broadly categorized into two types. The first one relates to theories that help social workers to understand individuals and their problems in various settings such as family, group, community and society; and thus help these professionals to intervene effectively. The second one deals with practice theories which are derived from the field. Many of these western oriented theories overlook the importance of socio-economic, cultural and political milieu of the non-western societies. While applying these theories, the practitioners thus face a multitude of challenges; and hence they tend to become dogmatic in their perseverance towards goal achievement. This paper argues that if critical reflection is used as a method of theorization, it would provide an inclusive approach (bottom-up) as against the rigid deductive empirical (top-down) theories.*

## **B**ackground

Critical reflection is a thinking process to attribute meaning to experience. It can be descriptive, analytical and critical. This paper seeks to explore and highlight the significance of critical reflection as tool in social work practice. It is thus divided into four sections. The first section introduces social work practice through a brief exploration of its history. The second section deals with the philosophical foundations and the theoretical perspectives of social work. The third section tries to build further upon the theoretical perspectives by contextualizing the Indian experience. The last section engages the reader with a critical reflection upon social work practice.

### **Embryonic Social Work**

Social work has emerged from charity/

philanthropic services to an autonomous helping profession. It is a common truth that social work evolved as a profession in response to the adversities of the 19th century social world and progressed as an applied discipline, heavily borrowing theories and knowledge from various social sciences. In India, social work practice remained rooted to the received theories and models from the West mainly including Europe and the United States. This stagnation affects the development of indigenous social work literature resulting in poverty of professional social work practice in India. Hence, to further enrich the profession, the contribution of practitioners in varied fields also need to be accredited and classified as social work literature through theorization of social work practice.

Although social work evolved from

social service activities in the late nineteenth century, it progressed from charity tradition to modern social work profession. The foundation of social work knowledge is derived from psychology, sociology, political science, economics, biology, counseling, and cultural anthropology.

Charity and philanthropic activities were the ancient methods of helping people who were in distress and destitution. Religious agencies organized welfare activities in this regard. Industrialization and its impact on society and subsequent historical events related to welfare activities in Europe and the United States after the world wars gave a new face to welfare activities. At this stage, the state is expected to provide organized welfare measures. This necessitated the need for training a new set of professionals for implementing welfare activities in a scientific manner. Thus, social work was born as an applied discipline in the West and the US.

But in India, the context was completely different from the western experience. Social work activities are inspired and influenced by social reformers. The socio-cultural traditions of Indian society had an innate tendency to help people who are in need through alms and charity. This was further supported by various social institutions such as the joint family and the caste system. However, Indian society had numerous social evils such as female infanticides, sati, suppression of Dalits and women, etc. In this context, the influence of Christian Missionaries was phenomenal. Although these missionaries were primarily interested in proselytization of the Hindus and the

tribes, they were critical about these social evils and imparted a new pattern of thinking instilling rationalism, democracy and liberalism among the Indian population. Moreover, the changes in the economic life of the rural population, leaving their land and migrating to urban centers, resulted in a new set of social problems for which welfare professionals were required (Gore 1965).

Meanwhile, Gokhale inducted social servants in 1905 but later it was realized that volunteers require training to involve them in fulltime service. In the 1920s, the Social Service League in Bombay offered a short training course for the volunteers. In 1936, Sir Dorabji Tata Graduate School of Social Work was established for preparing students for social work profession in formal setting (Ranade, 1976).

During this formative stage, social work education in India was fully influenced by the American model. The body of knowledge in this model of education contains (i) knowledge about human beings and society, (ii) knowledge about methods or techniques of social work, and (iii) knowledge about fields of social work (Gore, 1965). The problem with this model is that it does not really contextualize the social work practice in the Indian society.

After a phase of stagnation in social work, when University Grants Commission gave a free hand to the universities, there has been a mushrooming of social work educational institutions (Bhatt, 2010). Heavy dependency on the western model in social work education and practice did not encourage indigenous contribution to social work. Birj Mohan

(2008) rightly describes that 'social work's quality, content and effectiveness remain in a state of flux' and further states that "while social work as an academic discipline has to achieve its legitimacy within an interdisciplinary framework, its identity and mission remain incomplete because of continued dualism, conflicts and contradictions in theory and practice, and a mission that still remains obtuse in the polemics and politics of institutional, organizational, curricular and cultural conundrums".

The contemporary problems in social work in India includes (i) lack of indigenous knowledge and theory by Indian academics and practitioners, (ii) not recognizing practitioners' contribution to social work literature (Bhatt, 2010), (iii) eclectic approach without theorizing practices, and (iv) not adopting an inclusive social work theory suitable for Indian socio-cultural and political context.

Against this background, social work education and practice in India must reflect the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) definition. IFSW and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) have approved the following definition:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and

enhance wellbeing (IFSW, 2014).

Therefore, the Indian social work education/practice must change from individual focused to community centered approach or from problem solving approach to social development approach incorporating a social work process which follows a systematic approach toward social change and development. According to David Howe (1997) social work process include (i) the formulation of problems and the identification of needs, (ii) the analysis of cases and the making of an assessment, (iii) the setting of goals and objectives, (iv) the design of methods of work and intervention, and (v) the review and evaluation of involvement. Social work practice since its inception as an interdisciplinary subject has been trying to evolve as a professional practice. Ernest Greenwood (1957) recommended six attributes of a profession which are a systematic body of knowledge, community sanction, authority or credibility, regulation and control of members, a professional code of ethics and culture of values, norms and symbols (cited in Vinton and Abell, 2010). But the present status of social work as a professional practice in India has shortcomings in fulfilling these attributes. In common parlance, there is a tendency to refer to social work as *shramdan* in India.

The future of social work practice depends upon acquiring knowledge from diverse disciplines, changing from a single professional service to integrated services combining information technology and adopting new fields of social work (Clark, 2003) such as forensic social work, corporate social work, public health social work,

etc.

### **Theories of Social Work**

This section examines various concepts that are interrelated and independent in social work discipline. Every social worker practices within a theoretical framework. Otherwise, an uninformed practice (which is not theory driven practice) may harm the clients. Theory as practice guideline 'helps to predict, explain and assess situations and behaviours, and provide a rationale for how the social worker should react and intervene with clients who have particular histories, problems or goals' (Teater, 2010). Method on the other hand, specifies what actually social workers do - also known as intervention, approach or practice. A model is a theory or method logically or graphically depicted, very useful for practice. Perspective meanwhile, provides a framework to view or understand a phenomenon based on a theory (Teater, 2010).

Social work theories can be broadly classified into two categories, as presented below.

- ♦ **Orienting Theories** : These theories are borrowed from biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, etc. Orienting theories help social worker to understand human behavior and their problem in a systematic way (e.g. psychodynamic, learning theory, conflict theory, rational choice theory, etc.)
- ♦ **Practice Theories** : These theories provide practice perspective to understand people and their environment. The practice theories

are rooted in one or more orienting theories and provide a framework or road map for bringing desired change in individuals or society (eg. psychoanalysis, problem solving, crisis intervention, etc.). Practice models are developed from practice theories to guide the intervention activities which as are similar to medical or legal models.

David Howe opines that the following components of social work theory must influence social work practice through five key areas. He says, theory must contain an observation (what to see and what to look out for), a description (a conceptual vocabulary and framework), an explanation (causal relationship), a prediction (what might happen next), and an intervention (actions to bring about change). Similarly, Payne (1997) suggests that social work theory which contains perspective, theory and model succeeds the best.

### **Theorizing from Practice**

Received theories of social work often do not contextualize the social, cultural and political settings of the Indian population. For instance, whenever there is any problem, the person does not always seek a professional for help rather he/she approaches the elders/friends for guidance. This is possible due to the social support that the people enjoy in collective societies like China and India. Therefore, social workers in India need an inclusive theory that guides the social workers' practice not only from theory to practice but also facilitate them to theorize their practice. In other words, inclusive theories such as anti-oppressive social work, anti-discriminatory social work, dalit social

work, tribal social work, etc. (Dominelli, 2002; Thompson, 2006; Bodhi, 2014) must form the bedrock of theorization of social work practice.

There are three approaches of practice theory - namely, empirical, theoretical and philosophical approaches. The empirical approach asks the 'what' questions informing the social workers to understand individual's action or reaction to their social environment/problem; the theoretical approach of practice theory offers specific explanation for the action or reaction of individuals by asking the 'how' question; and the philosophical approach raises the 'why' questions to logically rationalize the practices as fundamental to the production of social life (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

Martha S. Feldman and Wanda J. Orlikowski (2011) have identified three basic principles of theorizing practice in organizational phenomena, on Bourdieu's Logic of Practice and Giddens's The Constitution of Society. They are (i) everyday actions are consequential in producing social reality, (ii) dualisms are rejected as a way of theorizing and (iii) relations are mutually constitutive.

### **Critical Reflection and Social Work Practice**

According to Paulo Freire (1985), the process of critical reflection may help to blend intuition with intellectual rationality. To him, critical reflection is a lifelong process of learning and building working behavior based on learning and practice. Critical reflection involves reviewing different perspectives and options before deciding on the 'best practice' (Payne and others,

2009).

Adams (2009) suggests that critically reflective practice requires social workers to be both reflective and critical about the practice. Social workers can be reflective by asking themselves about situation and what happened. They can also be critical by 'reflecting on the experience, as to what was learnt and what will be adjusted or modified in future practice'.

Theorizing practice is a postmodern thinking. In the present context, the social workers experiences a sense of powerlessness in practicing social work; there is a fear of risk associated with practice based on received theories; and the complexities in practice has been increasing (Fook & Garner, 2007). All these factors necessitate the need for critical reflection so that the social work practice can be localized and accepted by the local communities.

For this, social workers need a practice model which will help them to theorize their practice. Such a model would provide a bottom up understanding of theory and practice; help close the gaps between theory and practice, make use of intuition, artistry and creativity in solving the problems; provide a contextual, holistic and experiential approach to social development; use reflexivity to create knowledge directly from practice experience; and based on post-modern social theory, the proposed model helps to understand the relationship between knowledge and power.

Theorizing from practice may result in inclusive social work practice which 'needs to forge beyond mere intellectual understanding of race, culture, and ethnicity and move toward practice that

is centred on the values, beliefs, assumptions, ways of living, and thinking' of those with whom the social workers are working.

### **Conclusion**

The paper thus tries to underline the significance of going beyond trying to connect the dots of social work practice with the theories on which the practice is based. Rather it tries to establish the urgency of drawing vivid learnings from the plethora of field experiences that social work as a profession can offer. In doing so, it espouses the virtues of essentialism wherein a critical reflection of the field experiences can serve as a tool in theorizing social work.

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#### **Corresponding Author**

Kathiresan L., Assistant Professor,  
Dept. Of Social Work, Assam  
University, Silchar - 788011, Assam.  
Email: kadir.jnu@gmail.com

## **Early Childhood Education: Issues of Access and Concerns for Marginalised Communities in Kancheepuram District, Tamil Nadu**

**DILIP DIWAKAR G.**

*Department of Social Work, Central University of Kerala*

*Early Childhood Education (ECE) gained lot of importance in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century in the developed countries. India made few initiatives before independence; however, after independence it got shaped into a Balwadi programme mainly focusing on Early Childhood Education. During the 5<sup>th</sup> plan, they introduced the ICDS programme, which is a more comprehensive early childhood care and education programme. Tamil Nadu has been acclaimed as one of the model state in terms of the ICDS programme, however, the access to preschool education is very low as compared to many other states. This paper has used the Macintyre framework to examine the access of preschool education by different communities and its implication on Early Childhood Care and Education. The finding shows that Tamil Nadu indeed has a better system, curriculum, and teaching methodology in place and many centres have taken very good initiatives in preschool education to function better. However, there are gaps in the contextual, compositional and collective factors, which make the programme not function up to the expectations in Tamil Nadu.*

### **Introduction**

Education is believed to help in achieving social, mental/cognitive, economic, cultural and political development. Therefore, it becomes one of the important tools in achieving human development. More than 70 % of the cognitive development of the children takes place during the first 3 years. In the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, many initiatives were taken to stimulate the cognitive development of the children from their childhood. This idea was mainly influenced by Froebel, Montessori and other western thinkers. Slowly in the West/developed countries, the concept of Early Childhood

Education (ECE) gained lot of importance concerning the psycho-social development of children. The play school and Kindergarten were introduced to cater to the children at a very young age (Swaminathan, 1998). The social workers gave lot of importance to early childhood care and development as it provides significant results in the social, cognitive, and mental development of the child.

This had a strong influence even in the South/developing countries. The introduction of the modern education paved a new path and increased its momentum. The first training institute in Tamil Nadu was established in Saidapet in 1888 by the Missionaries (Kaul, 1998). Pioneers in India were

Gijubhai Badheka and Tarabai Modak. They took some preschool initiatives in the 1920s and 30s in India (Khalakdina, 1998). The government had introduced the state sponsored Balwadi scheme for children after independence to facilitate the Early Childhood Education (ECE). In 1975, during the Fifth Five Year Plan the government introduced the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) for early childhood care and development. This programme takes care of the education, health and nutrition needs of the children of 0-6 years. Preschool education was given lot of importance in the ICDS programme, where a separate teacher was appointed for each centre to take care of the educational needs of the children. This programme was initially piloted in 33 projects and now it has got slowly expanded and is functioning in all the blocks of the country. Now we have about 14 lakh centres across India. From the inception of the programme, several studies were carried out to assess the impact and relevance of the programme. The awareness and knowledge of the 'Anganwadi' Worker (AWW), and the 'Anganwadi' Helper (AWH) on the importance of preschool was studied (Devi, 1990). It was felt that proper monitoring is important to ensure quality service, and hence some of the studies focussed on the supervisory mechanism of preschool (Kumari et.al, 1987). There were also studies conducted to examine the suitability of art education, play education, science education, and story books in imparting knowledge to the preschool children (Rathore & Dave, 1989; Vijayavargia, 1989; Mehtha, 1989; Sharma, 1989). Few control group studies were

conducted to see how imparting certain training for the AWWs influences preschool education (George & Srivastava, 1987; Roy & Vanaja, 1989), so that they can influence policy and give emphasis on the specific training component of the AWWs. Another study was conducted to see the perception of the AWW towards the non-formal preschool education (Mitra, 2004). There were two national studies conducted by the National Institute for Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) to appraise the preschool education component of ICDS.

The National Family Health Survey III (NFHS) data shows about 72.4 % of the enumeration area had an 'Anganwadi' centre (AWC) and about 81 % of the children in the age group of 0-6 were covered by the 'Anganwadi'. However, only 28 % of the children have received some services from the 'Anganwadi' centre in the last one year. In case of Tamil Nadu, about 42 % of the children have received some services from the centre. With regard to preschool education, at the all India level, around 23 % of the children have received preschool and in Tamil Nadu only 26.5 % of the children received preschool. Distribution of children across wealth quintile at all India level shows that about 24 % of the poorer and poorest quintiles are attending preschool education at the ICDS centre as compared to only 11 percent of the richest quintile. This clearly shows that the need for preschool at the ICDS centre was more essential for the poor children. Similarly, if we look across the social group, about 30% of STs, 25.5 % of SCs as compared to 21 % of Others

are attending preschool.

### **Analysis Frame Work**

The Macintyre model has conceptualised and operationalised the factors contributing to the 'place effect' on health. They suggest three types of explanation for the geographical variations in health: compositional, contextual and collective (Macintyre, 2002). The same model with some modification was used to assess the performance, functioning and access to preschool education from 'Anganwadi' centre by the marginalised community.

*Contextual* explains the local physical and social environment. Here we will see all the input/structural indicators, and along with that we will also see the availability of the AWW and AWH, location of the centre, distance and safety of the centre, nature of the building and the facilities available in the building. *Compositional* explains the characteristics of individuals concentrated in a particular place. In this we will see the profile of the community, respondents and AWWs, their education, occupation, caste and land holding. *Collective* explains the socio-cultural and historical features of communities. Here we will see the role of the providers in ensuring the access, experiences of the providers in provisioning of services, barriers and constraints in provisioning of services, community and providers' interactions, experiences in access and provisioning, and expectations of the community from the provider and vice versa (Macintyre, 2002).

### **Methods**

In India, Tamil Nadu is one of the better performing state in terms of the Human

Development Index (HDI). Studies show that the state has a better performing ICDS programme (Focus, 2006; Rajivan, 2006). However, in case of preschool education the proportion of children receiving preschool education was very less. In Tamil Nadu, a primary study was conducted in Kancheepuram, as it is one of the better performing rural district. An index was developed at the district and block level to identify the block and the AWC. Based on the index, the better performing Sriperumbudur block was selected. In this block the better performing Makanyam cluster and poor performing Chetipedu cluster were selected for the study. From Makanyam cluster, six 'Anganwadi' centres namely, Katchipattu I-IV, Navallur and Kannanthangal were identified; and from Chetipedu cluster, five 'Anganwadi' centres, namely Kandivakkam, Magadevi Mangalam, Gunakarambakkam, Gunakarambakkam Colony, Chetipedu were selected. These 11 'Anganwadi' centre were situated in seven different villages.

In depth interviews of 102 respondents were conducted, where 81 children in the age group of 2-6 years eligible for preschool were also identified from these households. Basic infrastructure and facilities available in the 11 'Anganwadi' centres were collected. Interviews of 9 'Anganwadi' workers and 10 'Anganwadi' helpers were conducted. Six cluster supervisors, one grade I supervisor and CDPO were also interviewed. Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) functionaries and other stakeholders in the villages were also interviewed. To assess the performance of the preschool education in the ICDS centres, this study used the Macintyre

model.

### Major Findings

**A. Contextual factors :** A few issues have been identified under administrative, human factor and infrastructural problems. They are mainly the dual responsibility of the teachers and helpers. About 50 % of the AWW has dual responsibility. They had to take care of other/nearby centres too as the desired personnel have either not been recruited or retired. Secondly, not having their own building created many problems. The centres were running in small, congested, and ill ventilated buildings with a lack of even the basic facilities. The government refuses to provide fund for wall painting, water tank, gas connection and electricity if the centre does not have its own building. Thirdly, the monitoring system has to be strengthened and the supervisors have to visit the centre at least once monthly and it has to be a surprise visit. The AWW are overburdened with a lot of work and hence could not give the required time to the centre's functions.

**B. Provisioning of Preschool :** Preschool education is one of the important components in ICDS. The stimulation activities for children can help improve cognitive development. Hence, preschool education for children has a different component to enhance cognitive and language development. In Tamil Nadu, preschool education takes place in a much-organised way. In the beginning of every year, a topic for each month is finalised. The topics are based usually on the regular things the children are exposed to and which they can easily relate with. Some of the broad topics used are national leaders, seasons,

vegetables, fruits, animals, birds, relations, food material, numbers, colours, alphabets etc. and they have to be taught a specific topic prescribed for that month. Each centre also has to prepare the following material on each topic every month.

- ♦ Visual learning
- ♦ Free talking
- ♦ Matching the pair
- ♦ Finding the missing pair
- ♦ Puzzle
- ♦ Stories

Apart from that they have to conduct the simulation games for the children. The teaching of the children should take place in play method. While looking into the functioning of the preschool component, the indicators for assessment are: 1) time spent on the preschool, 2) availability of the education material, and 3) the quality of education provided for the children.

**(i) Time Spent in Preschool :** Every day they have to conduct preschool and games for 2 hours, from 10am- 12pm. The people in Katchipattu III, Kandivakkam and Chetipedu village were happy with the preschool provided by the 'Anganwadi' centre. They told that the children were taught regularly with various preschool material. Apart from that, children were made to sing, tell stories and engage in games.

"The parents in a FGD told that they could hear the voice of the teacher every morning when she started teaching the children. She teaches songs, stories, speech practice, exercise, yoga for about 2 hours every day. All the parents agreed with that and they felt that the quality of education is very good in the 'Anganwadi' centre".

Although, they have to conduct preschool and games for 2 hours, most of the centres did not abide by the rules. Some of them teach either only few days in a month or give very less time every day for preschool. While interacting with the people in Kannanthal and Gunakarambakkam, they told that the teacher gives very less time in the preschool for the children. They said that they teach for only few days in a month and that too, for 30 to 45 minutes, and the rest of the days they don't teach anything. They do some register/administrative work or related work, or they go for some meetings. During these times, the children used to shout, beat each other or play in the centre.

"Earlier the children would come home and tell the songs, stories and other things the teacher has taught them; but now the teacher is looking after the Thathanur AWC. So she is not giving time for education to the children now a days" (Kannanthal, F/25).

In case of Gunakarambakkam the people told:

"Whenever I go that side, I see the children roaming outside the centre; the teacher comes very late and does not teach anything to the children". (Gunakarambakkam, F/25).

Another parent whose child is enrolled but not sending to the AWC regularly when the researcher asked about it, she told:

"we send them to AWC so that they can learn something, but if they did not teach anything then why should we send them to AWC" (Gunakarambakkam, F/26). The observation and the interaction with the people showed that Katchipattu I, II, Gunakarambakkam colony and

Navalur centres provide preschool but does not spend much time. On an average, she engages the children for an hour in some of the education and play activities, and after that she does recording related work.

In Katchipattu- I centre, it was conveyed that the teacher often goes to the CDPO's office so she cannot spend much time with the children. Only on the days she stays back at the centre, she teaches the children. The children knew songs, stories and other things. She also has to maintain her own register and so she is very busy. Moreover, she was taking care of Katchipattu IV centre, so she has to maintain the registers of that centre too.

**(ii) Availability of Education Material:**

The government has provided charts and other play materials for each centre. Moreover, the centres are supposed to have wall painting to provide pictorial learning for the children. Along with this, based on the topic of the month the teacher has to prepare material for Visual learning, Free talking, Matching the pair, Finding the missing pair, Puzzle and Stories. These are integral components to provide quality preschool in each centre. But the availability of these materials varies to a great extent in these centres. Availability of material alone does not determine the quality of preschool provided by the 'Anganwadi' centre. As we have discussed in the above section, the 'Anganwadi' worker/ teacher's interest also plays a pivotal role in providing preschool. As some centres even after having the material also did not use it properly, it rouses the curiosity of the reasons behind the non-usage of the material.

Some centres are running in rented

buildings and other government building do not have even the walls painted. All the centres except the one at Katchipattu IV have 6-7 charts given by the government. The centres that opened in 2006 got play material during the opening of the centre. After that in 2007, they were provided with rhyme books and few other books. Other centres did not receive any play materials in the last 5-6 years from the government. The Gunakarambakkam Colony, Kandivakkam, Katchipattu I, II and III centre had attended a training programme conducted by a NGO on child development, where they got play material in that programme as a complement. The rest of the centres had very few materials that were given long back by the government.

Very few centres make use of the available play materials in a proper way. The rest of them did not use the material as they feared the children may break it or get lost. As they did not get regular stock they wanted to keep the material safely. Though they know the importance and usage of the material they did not use it as they are answerable if they break/lose the material. The centres which were managed properly provided the material, as they taught self-discipline among the children and did not fear that the children will run away with the material, or throw it away, or break it.

The teacher has to give full attention to the children when they provide the material to them as they have to play with them, so that they can make use of the material for the cognitive development of the children. However, many of the teachers give the material and do their own work or go out to do

some other work. Thus the unattended children either break or throw away the material. They take this as a reason for not providing the material for the children. The observation and the interaction with the 'Anganwadi' worker of Katchipattu III, Chetipedu, Kandivakkam, showed use of the play material to the optimal level while the rest of the centres did not use the play material on a regular basis.

The other important aspect is the preparation of the education material every month to provide quality preschool. Every month the centres are mandated to prepare the education material. Some of the teachers took lot of interest and prepared materials for all the components; but the rest of the teachers did not have the interest or requisite materials. In the field observation, it was very much explicit that not all the centre had equal number of education material prepared by them. The Katchipattu III, Chetipedu, Kandivakkam had material to cover the entire component. All these factors have helped them to provide quality education to the children. While visiting the centre, it was observed that mostly the children above 4 years know songs, rhymes, alphabets, and stories.

Katchipattu I & II, and Magadevi Mangalam had very few material; and along with that, the above mentioned factors contributed them to provide only an average quality preschool for the children. Except few centres, children in all the centres could sing songs, tell stories and alphabets. In some centres even the young children actively participated, and it clearly showed the regularity of teaching and the confidence built in the children. The

Gunakarambakkam colony, Navalur, Kannanthangal, had very less material. The interaction with the children showed that the children were not taught properly and did not know much. Katchipattu IV is a mini centre and it did not have any material at all.

***(iii) Bringing and Dropping the Children Home:***

This is one of the important factors contributing towards sending the children to the ICDS centre. Along with quality education the parents also expect some support from the AWH to take the children to the centre regularly. Especially, in the villages where the centre is located slightly far from their habitation, parents wanted the helper to come regularly to collect the children. Moreover, pregnant, lactating, and employed women have problems to take the children every day, along with managing their household and other works. They find it as an additional burden, especially if the mother is working. If the AWH failed to collect the children, then the children were left idle at home. Regarding the centres which were very far from the residence, the problems were much intense and it was a real issue in those villages. This hindered some of them to send the children even if they were providing quality preschool education.

It was found that in Katchipattu-II, Gunakarambakkam Colony and Magadevi Mangalam, the AWH regularly goes and collects the children. In Katchipattu II, even the AWH goes sometimes to collect the children. The FGD revealed that the people were very happy and felt safe as they came to collect the children and also would leave the children safely back home.

"The AWH comes regularly to pick the children and drops them back home safely in the evening, so we do not have to worry about the safety of the children while crossing the road"(R4, F 27, Magadevi Mangalam).

On the other hand, it was found that the Kannanthangal, Katchipattu I centres helper rarely visits the houses to pick the children. If the children did not go for more than 2-3 days, either the teacher or the helper visits the house, to know the reason for their absence and they inform the mother to send them regularly and bring the children with them. The people in Navallur and Gunakarambakkam find it very difficult as the centre is very far from their home and the AWH also never visits their house to collect the children. The FGD in Navallur among the mothers revealed that in the morning, they take the children. Since there is a main road which has to be crossed to reach the centre, and so the children cannot go alone. One of the elders have to accompany them to the centre. In the evening, the helper crosses the road and leaves the children on the other side of the road.

The three best performing centres namely, Katchipattu-I, Chetipedu and Kandivakkam in terms of quality of preschool education, however, did not bring or drop them back home. As the quality is good, the parents themselves would bring the children to the centre everyday and take them back home too. Though they also have problems, but they take the pain as they get quality education from the 'Anganwadi' centre. Kandivakkam as the centre is very far from the SC locality. During the interaction with the people they said, "if

the helper comes and collects the children it would be of helpful for us". Some of the women have to take care of the younger siblings and few go for work too. So they find it difficult to take the children to the centre every day. They added that as they have to walk through the main road where the bus and other vehicles pass through often, it is unsafe to send them alone as someone has to accompany them.

**C. Accessing Preschool by Different Class and Caste Group**

Apart from the above mentioned factors, economic condition is one of the very important factor that helps in understanding which section of the people are accessing the preschool from ICDS. If they are rich, they can afford to send the children to the Private Nursery school instead of ICDS. Therefore, it is more important to see which factors influence and hinders in sending children to ICDS among different economic groups.

**Table 1: Economic Status of the Preschool Beneficiaries**

| Income (Rs.) | Type of Respondent |           |           |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|
|              | Not sending to PS  | Preschool | Total     |
| <1500        | 0                  | 1         | 1         |
| 1501-3000    | 7                  | 16        | 23        |
| 3001-4500    | 6                  | 22        | 28        |
| 4501-6000    | 3                  | 5         | 8         |
| 6001-9000    | 1                  | 3         | 4         |
| >9000        | 1                  | 0         | 1         |
| NA           | 0                  | 1         | 1         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>18</b>          | <b>48</b> | <b>66</b> |

Out of 66 children, 48 were sent to preschool and 18 children were kept at home idle. While looking into the characteristics of children not coming to preschool it clearly showed 9 children,

i.e., 50 % of them are in 25-30 months. As the children are too young, the parents are hesitant to send them and some of them are yet to be enrolled as the academic year is not over. Observation showed that in better performing centres, children below 2 years were sent to the 'Anganwadi' centre for practicing, so that they can be enrolled in the next year.

Of the remaining 9 children who are above 30 months and were not coming to preschool five children were in Rs. 4500- 6000 income group, only 4 were belonging to less than Rs. 4500 income group. The interview with those mothers clearly reveals that the improper functioning of the centre made them to keep the children at home rather than sending them to the 'Anganwadi' centre. If we look on the basis of caste, 11 from upper caste and 7 from Dalits have not sent their children to preschool. Even among the children coming to the 'Anganwadi', only 17 are from upper caste and 31 are Dalits. It shows more number of children from upper caste were not sending their children to preschool as compared to Dalits. Only at the centres that are functioning well, the children are going regularly, while in the rest of the centre, they go 2-3 days in a week or even rarely.

***Economic and Caste Profile of Children Going for Private Nursery School:***

Out of the 15 nursery going children from the sample, 13 of them are in the above Rs. 4500 income group and only 2 respondents are below the Rs. 4500 income group. When we look into the caste profile of the children going to nursery, it shows 6 from the upper caste and 9 from lower caste are sending their children to nursery. Even

though, it is proportionate to their sample size, observation shows the awareness on the importance is very high among people. Even the lower caste people having less income also want to send their children to nursery.

While enquiring parents on the need for sending their children to nursery although their income is very low, many of them expressed that the times are very competitive, and since they have not studied properly, they are struggling. They did not want their children to struggle like them and so wanted them to get educated in English medium schools so that they can get good jobs in companies and earn more money for their living

#### **D. Role of Supplementary Nutrition Feeding (SNP)**

As the children have to take lunch in the centre, it also plays an important role in determining whether the children should be sent to the centre or not. Freshly prepared mid-day meals are served to the children going to the '*Anganwadi*' centre for their preschool. Each day, they have to provide vegetables and spinach along with dal during the noon meals. Moreover, they provide 3 eggs in a week and sundal (boiled peas) on the days when egg is not provided. The vegetables for each day have been finalised by the department nutritionist in order to provide a complete and balanced diet for the children. Though the people did not complain on the quantity of the meals, there were few issues about the quality of the meals in few of the centres. There were mainly issues on: 1) cleaning of pulses and grains, 2) the quantity of vegetables in the food, 3) the timing of the meals provided to the children, and

4) the quality of the food grains and pulses.

In the interviews and FGDs, it was clearly established that the people in Katchipattu I, II, III and IV, Kannanthangal, Kandivakkam, Magadevi Mangalam, and Chetipedu are happy with the quality of the food provided in the centres. They said that the meals are provided in time and they use vegetables regularly. They said that at home, they did not have food properly as they take food alone; but in the centres they tend to eat more as they are eating along with other children. Moreover, they were happy that they provide three eggs in a week and 'sundal' (boiled peas) on two days. They also said that on special occasions they provided special lunch for the children.

However, in Gunakarambakkam Colony, in Gunakarambakkam and Navallur, on the contrary, the people complained of various problems with the noon meals. In these centres, they said the helper did not clean the rice and the pulses properly, did not provide food on time and did not provide vegetables sufficiently.

#### **E. Collective Factors**

The role of the village members and the community in ensuring the functioning of the AWC is inevitable. Interaction between the community and providers is crucial in making the centre function better. The expectations of the community from the provider and the expectations of the providers from the community are other crucial factors to observe. If the expectations are not met, then it disappoints them and there is poor performance of the programme. The participation of the parents, 'Mahila

Mandals', youth groups, SHGs, community leaders and PRI members in the ICDS activities are important factors to influence the performance and functioning of the centre.

**F. Role of Social Worker :** The role of the social worker in this programme is very crucial. He has to act both at the individual as well as at the community level. At the individual level, he has to inform the parents about the importance of the preschool education and motivate them to send the children. He has to bridge the gap between the AWW and the parents. Preschool education or even the ICDS programme was not given much importance at the villages. He has to inform the '*Mahila Mandals*', youth groups, SHGs, community leaders and PRI members about the importance of ICDS programme on the early childhood care and development of the children. He thus has to make the programme a community priority, reactivate the anganwadi committee, engage in community monitoring of their activities, and support materially/financially the anganwadi activities.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the ICDS programme in Tamil Nadu is performing better than in many of the other states in India. Here the centres exist, and they open regularly, the community knows about the centre, most of the beneficiaries are receiving some services. Even if they did not receive the service appropriately, they know that the services are available in the AWC. The AWW as well as AWH are in place, and buildings are available with basic infrastructure facilities. Even in terms of monitoring they have a clear system where they maintain registers,

have monthly MMR meetings at the cluster level and monthly block meetings. The supervisor also visits the centre on an average once in two months and the CDPO also visits the centre once in 6 months. So, there are lots of scopes for the improvement of their functioning. The other reason for low participation in preschool at Tamil Nadu could be the importance given to the English medium schools. So, it becomes mandatory to send the children for nursery classes to join them in English medium school.

But there are a few problems in the functioning, which if taken care of, then it will become one of the best performing states in India. In the contextual factors, there are a few issues which can be classified under administrative, human factor and infrastructural problems. They are mainly the dual responsibility of the teachers and helper. The centres mostly run in rented buildings and are very small, congested, ill-ventilated and lack even the basic facilities. The monitoring system has to be strengthened and the supervisors have to visit the centre at least once monthly and it has to be a surprise visit. The interaction between the AWW and the community has to be improved to get more support and participation from the community in order to lessen some of the hindrances. The supervisor and the CDPO should interact with the community when they visit the centre and get their suggestions and grievances for the centre's improvement. The panchayat President and functionaries are not at all involved in the ICDS activities. This has to change. The SHG and youth groups and other existing groups in the village should be involved to get more support from the community.

Apart from the preschool, they should also be involved in the Nutrition Health and Education programmes, home visits and other ICDS activities, and giving importance only on SNP and records should be minimised.

To make the preschool education comprehensive, all the required play material and education materials should be given to the centres every year. The wall paintings should be done for all the centres, and the materials prepared by the teacher every month based on the syllabus has to be improved. It is imperative that the teacher must spend sufficient time on the preschool activities.

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#### **Corresponding Author**

Dilip Diwakar, G., Assistant Professor, Dept. Of Social Work, Central University of Kerala, Tejaswini Hill campus, Periyar post, Kasaragod - 671316. Kerala.  
Email: dilipjnu@gmail.com

## Transgenders in Kerala: An Alarm on Social Exclusion

**KAVEESHER KRISHNAN**

*Kerala State AIDS Control Society, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala*

*Transgenders are highly invisible in Kerala. Non acceptance of their very existence, denial of alternative sexual identities and upkeep of familial pride within their pseudo-morality in Kerala are major hurdles in inclusion into the mainstream social spheres. Stigma, discrimination and violence among transgenders further perpetrates their life at multiple levels. Welfare measures of the government are intended to be accessed only by males and females and it thus hints at their helplessness and neglect in the society. Such social exclusion not only generates tension, violence and disruption but also perpetuates inequality and deprivation. Among the high risk groups, transgenders have the highest HIV infection rate. Current HIV prevention programs among transgenders need expansion to address contextual issues, enable them to access prevention-treatment services as well as various socio-economic schemes, and thus overcome their HIV vulnerability. Considering the complex network of individuals and their behaviours, it is not possible to ignore the existence of transgenders and their sexual orientations in our society. Though overcoming 'exclusion' seem to remain a distant dream, efforts to strengthen political and legal support systems in the state are in progress. A rights based vertical intervention is urged to recognise transgenders as equal citizens in our society.*

### **Social Framework of Transexuality**

Transgenders are persons whose gender identity, expression or behaviour does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. "Trans" is sometimes used short for "transgender". While transgender is generally a good term to use, it must be noted that not everyone whose appearance or behaviour is gender-nonconforming will identify as a transgender person. The term generally refers to those who transgress social gender norms and is an umbrella term to signify individuals who defy rigid binary gender constructions and express or present a breaking and/or blurring of culturally prevalent stereotypical gender roles (UNDP,2010). Transgenders may live full or part time in the gender role 'opposite' to their biological sex.

Transgenders, as a subject of discourse

on gender and sexuality is highly complex owing to their invisibility in our society, an outbreak from the binary in gender perceptions, non-acceptance of their very existence and denial of sexual identities and related expressions. While women's issues are debated around, the sexuality and life situation of transgenders are ignored and ill-voiced. The socio-legal framework on sexuality tags transgenders as "unnatural", thus denying their basic human and sexual rights. The socio-political and cultural environment has yet to accept their very existence and wellbeing. Transgender, as a community is constructed predominantly on patriarchal framework and those sentiments, thereby reflecting and safeguarding society's morality. Within this socio-cultural milieu, will transgender, as a third gender find solace within the pre-existing patriarchal or matriarchal

system in the state. Cross dressing or display of feminine attributes as an expression of their sexual identity are considered behavioural deviancies. The care of transgenders are an issue of civil rights and citizenship. Many barriers that transgenders experience to accessing welfare services contravene their basic rights. Countries are often signatories to global documents that aim to protect rights, but for many reasons, transgenders are often considered not covered by these rights (Radhakrishnan, 2012). A societal negotiation to their position and provide a sexuality status to transgenders different from male or female identities certainly requires a significant social reformation process. Transgenders are one among the most marginalised and vulnerable communities with very pathetic and miserable life conditions in India. The general outlook of the Kerala society premises on false pride embedded on pseudo morality. Though inclusive legislations for transgenders can bring changes, modifying the general outlook of society on transgenders would be a herculean task. Such perceptions force these persons to hide their sexual identities and expressions, suppress sexual desires, live a life in the dark as alien creatures of a conservative society. Living as a transgender in Kerala, someone who identifies with a gender different than the one assigned at birth is an experience filled with trauma and tensions. Boys who dress in women's clothing or girls who identify themselves as male are either bullied or dismissed casually. When they grow up and assert their gender identities, relatives often turn hostile and banish transgender persons from their homes. They are

subjected to torture, are often banished and ostracised by the society. These persons thus face discrimination all throughout their lives. Stigma on this community prevails in the public psyche, forcing them to migrate to other states and cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad, or Delhi. Since they are denied from the manual labour jobs, in these cities they have to make their living by begging, paid sex work etc.

### **Who is a Transgender?**

The WHO defines *Transgender* as an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and expression does not conform to the norms and expectations traditionally associated with the sex assigned to them at birth; it includes people who are transsexual, transgender or otherwise considered gender non-conforming (WHO,2015). Transgender people may self-identify as transgender, female, male, trans woman or trans man, trans-sexual, or by a variety of indigenous terms used in specific cultures, such as Hijra (India), Kathoey (Thailand), Waria (Indonesia), or one of many other transgender identities (WHO, 2015). They may express their gender in a variety of masculine, feminine and/or androgynous ways. The high vulnerability and specific health needs of transgender people necessitate a distinct and independent status in the global HIV response.

"Gender identity" refers to a person's internal, deeply felt sense of being either man or woman, or something otherwise, or in between. Because gender identity is internal and personally defined, it is not visible to others. In contrast, a person's "gender expression" is external and socially perceived. Gender

expression refers to all of the external characteristics and behaviours that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions. Transgenders are individuals of any age or sex whose appearance, personal characteristics, or behaviours differ from stereotypes about how men and women are "supposed" to be. Transgender people have existed in every culture, race, and class since the story of human life has been recorded (MoSJ&E, 2015). Only the term "transgender" and the medical technology available to transsexual people are new. In its broadest sense, transgender encompasses anyone whose identity or behaviour falls outside of stereotypical gender norms.

Though there are no validated national estimates on the size of transgender populations, anecdotal guesstimate places the population of transgenders to be between 0.5 and 1 million in India (NACO, 2011). In an unpublished UNDP study, based on the numbers reported by 42 sites from different parts of India, at least 166,665 *hijras* and transgender people were estimated to reside in the areas covered by interventions. For working purposes, the lower bound is estimated to be 166,665 and the upper bound range will be established through data triangulation using mapping and validation data. The census recently introduced an 'other' category in an attempt to get an estimate but that road has been severely fraught with difficulties. Most *hijra* people migrate from their hometowns and this is largely because they are disowned by their families. The stigma attached to being a *hijra* is so massive that the

families deny their existence. This stigmatisation against members of the transgender (TG) and *hijra* community is a regular fare across most parts of the country (Siddarth, 2003).

### **Transgenders in Indian Mythology and History**

Sexual minorities have always existed in India in forms, which are culturally sanctioned (such as the *hijra*) and at other times in invisibility and silence forms. However, their issues have never seriously been articulated. It is only recently that the rights of sexual minorities as an issue have been taken seriously in India by certain civil society organizations (Tripathi, 2013)

In India, transgenders have a strong historical space in the mythology and religious texts (Shinde, 2012). In most of the religious texts there are a number of persons who are described as transgenders and had an important role. In the Vedic and Puranic literatures the concept of *Tritiya Prakriti* or "Napumsaka" (which means the absence of procreative capability) became an integral part (Das, 2012). Hinduism considers blessings from *hijras* sacred and sometimes even compulsory. In the epic Ramayana, it is mentioned that Lord Rama was impressed with the devotion of the *hijras* who remained along with him and thus sanctioned them the power to confer blessings on people on auspicious occasions like childbirth and marriage as well as at inaugural functions. This is believed to have set the stage for the custom of *badhai* in which *hijras* sing, dance and confer blessings (Patel, 2010). In Mahabharata, Aravan offers himself to be sacrificed to Goddess Kali to ensure

the victory of the Pandavas in the Kurukshetra war with a request that he be married before his death. There were no women to marry him. Then *Krishna* assumes the form of a beautiful woman called Mohini and marries him. It is also said that the form of Lord Shiva which merges with Parvathi and is known as Ardhanari, is believed to be the patron of the *hijras* beings worshiped in North India (Siddarth, 2003). Jain Texts also make a detailed reference to transgenders which mentions the concept of 'psychological sex' (Serene, 1999). Mughals used *hijras* for protection of harems (house/section of house meant to protect concubines/sexual partners). Culturally society used to fend for *hijras* 'survival and well-being' (Serene, 1999). In India there are a host of socio-cultural groups of transgender people like *hijras*/Kinnars, and other transgender identities such as *Shiv-Shaktis*, *Jogtas*, *Jogappas*, *Aradhis*, *Sakhis*, etc (Sharma, 2012). However, these socio-cultural groups are not the only transgender people, but there may be those who do not belong to any of the groups but are transgender persons individually (Siddarth, 2003). Though an accurate and reliable estimate of transgenders are not available, it cannot be denied that their number is miniscule compared with the total population of the country. According to government records, there are only 25 lakh transgenders in India. Anybody who is part of the community will point out that this is a gross under-estimation. Kerala state records maintain that there are no transgenders while UP, which has a population of 200 million, put the official number at a mere 17,000 (Madhu, 2015).

### **Problems and Challenges in the Present Day**

Transgenders live a lifelong conflict between their body, behaviour and mind. So far, transgenders have been excluded from effectively participating in social and cultural life, economy, politics and decision making processes (Minter and Daley, 2003). A primary reason (and consequence) of the exclusion is the lack of (or ambiguity in) legal recognition of the gender identity/ status of the transgender, it is a key barrier that often prevents them in exercising their rights related to marriage with a man, child adoption, inheritance, wills and trusts, employment and access to public and private health facilities and access to and use of social welfare and health insurance schemes. Pushed to the periphery as social outcasts, they have to beg, dance or engage in sex work for survival (Nanda, 1996). The National AIDS Control Policy acknowledges the existence of transgender identity and practices, yet paradoxically they remain the most invisible and marginalised population (NACO, 2008).

The main problems that are being faced by the transgender community are of discrimination, unemployment, lack of education facilities, homelessness, lack of medical facilities like HIV care and hygiene, depression, hormone pill abuse, tobacco and alcohol abuse, penectomy and problems related to marriage and adoption (UNDP, 2008). In society, key misconceptions on alternative sexual expressions is that transgender related expressions are illnesses to be cured. Atrocities against transgenders lead to fear of one's sexuality. In railway stations, transgenders are being arrested

by railway protection force on the charge of begging. Right from the early stages in life, transgenders undergo tremendous physical and emotional torture. In schools, they are sexually harassed by teachers, senior students and mocked by peers. Most school drop-outs enter into sex work subsequently, and therefore their low education level hinders them in getting good employment too. Even at menial jobs like salesmen and coolie, transgenders are bullied (Atholi, 2015). Ignorance and non-acceptance of alternate sexualities (including expressions) in families, results in expulsion from homes and forced marriages. Transgenders migrate to other states for having been physically assaulted and expelled from homes, and even denied inheritance of parental properties. Most forced marriages of transgenders lead to separation but a social challenge existing in this regard has hardly been debated in public. Studies indicate that transgenders suffer from depression and resort to suicide at least once in their lives.

A good proportion of transgenders from Kerala have migrated to other states, realising their meagre scope to peaceful life after revealing their gender identity, in the hope of more acceptance and supportive welfare measures including free aid in Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) for transgenders in other states. SRS is a surgical procedure to change sex organs of their preferred gender. Despite knowing the fact of SRS bringing side effects, transgenders undergo procedures hoping to gain opposite gender status in the strained society. Having borne heavy costs on these surgeries and worse still, consequent ill-treatment to those who

have undergone surgery; transgenders migrate to other states (Atholi, 2015). It must be noted that the Tamil Nadu government supports those who wish to undergo SRS, hormonal and laser treatment for transgenders free of cost. Certain studies indicate that repeal of Section 377 in the IPC would mean to decriminalise same sex and acceptance beyond the pre-conceived notions of male-female gender framework, leading to decline in the demand for SRS among transgenders (Chakrapani, and others, 2004).

Along with legal changes, if other things such as transgender inclusive gender education in the school curriculum for students, change in attitude of teachers, police and general public are promoted, it would certainly help in checking school drop-outs among transgenders (Atholi, 2005). To curb harassments, special police cells to file cases against transgenders are warranted.

### **Legal System for Transgenders in India**

Twenty nine countries have legislations controlling the rights of transgenders. In India, although they have voting rights, it is a trauma that allegedly at the behest of either sex, they are allegedly denied entry into trains. Transgenders face a high level of stigma and physical, sexual, emotional violence. Violence in terms of neglect and discrimination in educational institutions are leading and most of them are dropping out from their studies. Exclusion from society and family is one of the main hindrances for accessing education. The insensitive teachers and staff in educational institutions towards the community also have an adverse impact on the continuity

of a transgender persons in an educational institution. Their low levels of education in turn either pushes them to other occupations like sex work making them vulnerable to HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infection, or force them to take sub optimal jobs like begging etc. (Rajesh and Naved, 2013) None of the articles in the Indian Constitution pronounce citizens based on their gender, hitherto curbing the rights and privileges of transgenders (Sathasivan, 2011). Article 15 of the Indian Constitution render rights to protection of any citizen irrespective of their gender. Article 14 provides equal rights and legal protection to everyone. Article 21 ensures right to expressions. However, transgenders have always been denied rights to equality in their entire sphere of lives. For instance, on denial of government employment, transgenders are excluded by virtue of their inability to indicate gender as a column in employment application forms and receive compensation benefits and as a nominated heir of the deceased under the Employees State Insurance (ESI) Act. The Equal Wages Act and Factories Act have excluded transgenders to avail employment related benefits. Definition of heirs of the deceased in the Hindu Property Inheritance Act too are non-supportive to transgenders. Due to poor education and inability to comprehend for the need of legal aid, transgenders are mostly breached of their fundamental rights (Atholi, 2015). Though these groups recently received voter cards based on their gender, however the right to vote of transgenders are bound under an executive order of the Election Commission.

The Supreme Court of India formally recognized transgenders for the first time and following the verdict, transgender were to be considered as other backward class and they will be given educational and employment reservation. Within this backdrop of verdict, specific civil and criminal laws to protect transgenders are warranted against sexual, physical and mental harassments (The Hindu, 2014). Most protective laws against rape, domestic violence, workplace harassment etc. are female friendly. Case file records registered for and by transgenders in police stations are obstructed owing to not being able to identify transgenders merely by physical appearance (Sreejith, 2015). There are constraints in the laws to adopt children by transgender couples too. Reinstating Section 377 of the IPC by the Honourable Supreme Court on "unnatural sex" as a punishable offence, it aggravates and impinges the rights of the transgender to express their emotions and infringes their livelihood means too (Atholi, 2015). Transgenders would be outraged from being punished under Section 377 of the IPC for these reasons. On 24th April 2015, the rights of the Transgender Persons Bill, 2014 was passed in Rajya Sabha (Private Member Bill by Sri Tiruchi Siva, DMK MP from Tamil Nadu) aiming to promote the rights of Transgender, including reservation and financial aid (PTI News, 2015). The bill urges for a rights based vertical intervention to recognise transgenders as equal citizens and render reservations in the public sphere (Siva, 2015).

The Supreme Court judgment has also directed the Central and State Governments to grant legal recognition

of their gender identity, to treat them as socially and educationally backward classes and to extend all kinds of reservation in cases of admission in educational institutions and for public appointments. The Centre and State Governments have also been directed to operate separate HIV Zero-Surveillance Centres since transgenders face several sexual health issues (MoSJ&E, 2015). On the basis of the Supreme Court Judgement, it is necessary for the state and central government to study the status of the transgenders, the problem being faced by them and frame a policy for covering the areas of health, education, employment, housing, protection from harassment and abuse. Though slow on progress, Kerala state government has declared forming a Transgender Welfare policy with the objective of ensuring the right for self-identification of gender as man, woman or transgender, provide them with proper educational facilities, health facilities, basic amenities such as water supply, sanitation, housing facilities and provision of employment, addressing the stigma, discrimination and violence faced by them etc.

States primarily Maharashtra (Menon, 2015) and Tamil Nadu (Sekhar, 2014) have been at the forefront to draft welfare schemes for these persons in their respective states. Post this judgement, the Allahabad High Court had ruled that transgenders are entitled to the status of head of a household. With this status, they will be able to avail food security benefits through ration card (PTI News, 2015). University Grants Commission notified transgenders as the third gender to enable them for admission, to avail benefits of all

scholarships schemes and fellowship programs in higher education as well (PTI News, 2015). As a result, various central and state universities have included the transgender category for mentioning sex in their admission forms, made reservation provisions for scholarships etc. Based on a writ petition, the High Court of Kerala has recently sought Government of Kerala for an affidavit that would ensure all welfare benefits and privileges to Transgender persons in the state in tune with the direction of the Supreme Court (The Hindu, 2015).

#### **HIV Intervention and other Welfare Activities**

World Health Organisation (WHO) informs that in the middle income countries like India, Men having Sex with Men (MSM) that includes transgenders are 19 times more at risk than the general population to HIV and AIDS (WHO, 2014). HIV prevalence among MSM is 7.3% and most nations including India has not created supportive socio-legal environment to access rights and freedom to avail HIV prevention services and practice safe sex. WHO observes that nations have instead played a vital role in increasing HIV infection rate among MSM including transgenders by discriminating alternative sex. WHO also observes that criminalisation of same sex has been a major obstacle for designing welfare schemes on these communities. Governments need to halt HIV prevalence rates among these groups by bringing anti-discrimination and protective laws as per international standards.

Until recently, the only national program

for transgenders has been the HIV prevention program for the challenges to confront the high rates of HIV infection among transgenders (NACO, 2007). In the third phase of the National AIDS Control Programme, it was highlighted that transgenders have different HIV prevention and care needs although there are some commonalities with MSMs. Considering the high HIV prevalence among transgenders when compared with other high risk groups, it is crucial that HIV interventions among them are scaled up. The national strategy drafted by the NACP-IV working group acknowledges the unique HIV prevention, care, and treatment needs of *hijras* and transgender people (NACO, 2011). To scale up transgender interventions, operational guidelines for TG- Hijra interventions have been developed.

Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have implemented some steps that make life a little easier for these deprived genders. Tamil Nadu was the first state in India to introduce a transgender (*Hijra/Aravani*) welfare policy. According to the transgender welfare policy, transgender people can access free Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) in the Government Hospital (only for MTF); free housing program; various citizenship documents; admission in government colleges with full scholarship for higher studies; alternative sources of livelihood through formation of self-help groups (for savings) and initiating income-generation programmes (IGP). Tamil Nadu was also the first state to form a Transgender Welfare Board with representatives from the transgender community (Atholi, 2015).

### **Vision for Transgender Friendly Society**

Transgenders in India face a variety of issues. So far, these communities perceive that they have been excluded from participating in social and cultural life; economy; and politics and decision-making processes. A primary reason (and consequence) of the exclusion is perceived to be the lack of (or ambiguity in) recognition of the gender status of *hijras* and the transgenders. It is a key barrier that often prevents them in exercising their civil rights in their desired gender. So it is very important to adopt transgender welfare policies and welfare measures to create a transgender friendly environment for surviving the present gender binary limitations in Kerala society. The following initiatives could be rolled out to mainstream transgenders in our society (Atholi, 2015):

1. Involve transgenders in all sectors where males and females have presence
2. Reservation in education, as seen in other states
3. Impart knowledge on transgenders in the school curriculum
4. Support to start self-employment, as practiced in other states for people engaged in sex work
5. Reservation in employment in government and public sector
6. Pension and ration card
7. Special space in public toilets
8. Usage as Transgender against the Third Gender
9. Special schemes in government (health, housing and education)
10. Subsidised travel in public transport
11. Free services in hospital,

counselling centres, awareness to teachers, police and parents

Further the following legal interventions could create an enabling environment for transgenders to enjoy citizenship of the state:

1. Forced marriages and forced SRS to be considered illegal
2. Include transgenders in definition on gender in the laws pertaining to rape, domestic violence. Modify IPC 374, 375, 377 accordingly
3. Update and compile information about crimes on transgenders in the Crime/ Police records
4. Constitute Commission and Boards to ensure quality of life among transgenders
5. Special legal aid system to address issues related to denial/ loss of property, violences, denial of human rights on transgenders

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### **Corresponding Author**

Kaveesher Krishnan, Team Leader, TSU- Kerala State AIDS Control Society, Thiruvananthapuram - 695035. Kerala.  
Email: [kaveesher@gmail.com](mailto:kaveesher@gmail.com)

## **Factorial Influence of Support System in the Educational Attainment of Gender Variant Persons in Chennai, Tamil Nadu**

**G. NEATHRAVATHI**

*Department of Social Work, Loyola College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu*

**GLADSTON XAVIER**

*Department of Social Work, Loyola College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu*

*Gender non-conforming or gender variant has become more visible in India after the advent of HIV. Though initially their identification and collectivization were aimed towards health issues, later the same turned into a rights forum for these people. The oppression towards gender variance starts at childhood, immediately after the child exhibits gender non-conforming behavior. However, they become visible to the society only during adolescence, which leaves less opportunity to know about the childhood experiences of gender variant persons. The gender non-conforming behaviour of the child restricts their opportunity to participate in various activities and has an impact on socio-economic and psychological conditions as they grow up. The purpose of the study was to find out the educational experience as well as the factors influencing the educational attainment of gender variant persons. A descriptive study was conducted among 85 gender variant persons in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, between the age group of 18 - 35 years on their experience of accessibility and attainment of education. Key findings of the study shows that, higher is the parents' education coupled with a positive attitude towards the gender variant person, it has significantly impacted their educational attainment. It was found that discrimination in the family and by peers resulted in school dropouts among gender variant persons.*

### **I**ntrouduction

Gender is one of the universal dimensions on which status differences are based. Unlike sex, which is a biological concept, gender is social construct specifying the socially and culturally prescribed roles that men and women are to follow. No matter what the makeup of the family, the cultural background, gender expectations are often strong and unswerving (Burgess, 2009). When the behavior or gender expression of a person does not conform to the assigned set of roles respective to their sex and gender, then it may be seen as gender variance. Such deviations can

encounter strong rejection by the wider society. The state of gender variance not only inflicts societal violence but also perpetuates discrimination and marginalization in various aspects of lives of the gender variant person. As gender variance challenges the culture and the structures created by it, gender variance is treated as intolerable and been systemically isolated from the mainstream society. Social isolation may be considered as one of the most significant and dangerous aspects of trans-identity (Israel and Traver, 1997). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), and gender-nonconforming youth are at elevated risk levels for

experiencing victimization (Kosciw, and others, 2008; O'Shaughnessy, and others, 2004) and negative psychosocial adjustment e.g., suicidality, depression, anxiety; (D'Augelli, and others, 2006). Though all LGBT are vulnerable for victimization and stigmatization, transgenders who have changed their biological sex and gender identities are more vulnerable. Lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals can selectively come out, whereas transgenders, because of changes in gender or biological appearance, are often forced out of the closet, creating awkward or even dangerous situations (Gagné and others, 1997). Since their preference for changed gender identity is so visible they are at the heightened risk of facing discrimination from the social circles. Usually when a child exhibits gender non-conforming behaviour it is dealt with negative social sanctioning to make the child understand that such deviations are socially unacceptable. The child is constantly forced to fall within the dominant system of gender both by enforcement of appropriate gender behaviour as well as through stern punishment for gender expressions that fall "outside" the dominant gender system. Frequently, those who fall outside or between the gender binaries are encouraged to conform to the dominant system (Raymond 1994). A number of studies document the direct effects of individual-level characteristics (i.e., gender nonconformity and sexual minority status) and social experiences (e.g., school victimization, negative family experiences) on psychosocial adjustment (Carver and others, 2003; D'Augelli and others, 2002; Rivers, 2001a; Russell & Joyner, 2001; Yunger

and others, 2004).

### **Societal Confrontation on Gender Variance**

The family is the system with perhaps greater influence on one's development. From birth through young adulthood, this unit has as one of its primary tasks the "physical, mental, emotional and social development of each of its members" (Duvall, 1971, cited on Schriver, 1995). The family is usually seen as a safe shelter free of violence and provides a protective environment. However the situation for a gender variant person in the family is different. The expression of identity becomes an act of rebellion in the parent or guardian's eyes, one that must be punished severely or with more intense therapy (Burgess, 2009). Parents will unfortunately be surrounded by social pressure and professional advice that insists that something is wrong with their child (Cooper, 2009). The extreme stigmatization in the society around gender variance makes it difficult for the families to accept their children. Due to the intolerance of the wider society, the family often confines the gender variant person to conform with the larger societal norms through punishment and negative reinforcement which often leads to isolation and stigmatization in the family and pushes the gender variant person to leave the home. The fear of stigma is so strong among the general populace that it is not only driving transgenders out of their homes but also puts into danger their families' relationships within the kinship circles and also hinders formation of new relationship with others (PUCL, Karnataka).

Next to families, schools have the second most significant impact on one's development during adolescence. Schools are the testing ground for social skills and through this setting, identity formation takes place. School officials who perceive children and adolescents as gender variant, target them as individuals to be closely monitored for 'acting out' behaviours. Gender variant boys will likely be mercilessly teased for not being rough and tumble (Mallon and DeCrescenzo, 2009). Teasing and harassment are also something that most transgender youths must endure, and can take the form of violence (Davis, 2009). Peer reactions to gender nonconforming behaviour are often negative, ranging from verbal questioning of another's biological sex to physical abuse (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Garofalo and colleagues (1998) found that adolescents who identified as LGBT were more than four times as likely as their heterosexual peers to have skipped school during the past month because they felt unsafe or to have been injured or threatened with a weapon at school during the past year. They have also shown disproportionate representation in substance abuse, suicidal tendency and health risk behaviours. The 1995 Seattle Youth Risk Behavior Survey-a school census of all students in grades 9-12-found that one in three lesbian, gay or bisexual young people had been victimized because of their sexual orientation (Reis and Saewyc, 1999). Socialisation has a powerful effect on human psychology and established ideas developed from childhood to adulthood are hard to break. Acceptance by a group could enable and encourage positive self-esteem and self-acceptance.

Identification with one's cultural group is a significant component in the development of an individual's self-concept. 'Living a lie' and not being a part of a group or society in which we can feel totally free to be ourselves can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation as well as potentially cause damage to self-esteem and weaken self-acceptance (Brown, 2009). Social isolation may be considered one of the most significant and dangerous aspects of a trans-identity (Israel and Traver, 1997). Gender variant persons often encounter hostile stares and comments, as well as stigmatizing and insensitive treatment from peers which directly influences the ability to stay in school. As with family, pressures at school lead to further isolation of transgender youth (Davis, 2009).

### **Social Work Intervention**

Education is an important tool for development which directly influences the status of a person economically, socially and culturally. It is also an effective tool to cut across marginalization. Henceforth educational attainment is not only related with occupational mobility but also with social mobility. In order to come out of the nexus of stigmatization and marginalization, educating oneself about the structural process of denial of rights is vital to fight against it and to ascertain their rights as equals. But with various studies, it is clearly sensed that peer rejection and abuse adding to negative family experience is a common phenomenon of gender non-conforming youth. It has also been noted that elevation in the grades leads to higher victimization both in school as well as

family, where both home and the school environment makes education an unpleasant experience. Lack of school non-discrimination policies leaves transgender youth without needed protections from bullying and aggression in schools (Singh & Jackson, 2012). As we can see that school is not the only place which treats differently the gender variant persons, such persons are often put into situations of discrimination and harassment in their social circles. Adherence of mainstream society to the gender binary adversely affects TGNC people within their families, schools, healthcare, legal systems, workplaces, religious traditions, and communities (SPR & ACLU National Prison Project, 2005; Bradford and others, 2013; Brewster and others, 2014; Levy & Lo, 2013; McGuire, and others, 2010). Hence awareness of and sensitivity to gender variance among the wider society is necessary to prevent rights violation and atrocities; and to create a non-discriminative enabling environment to realise and attain social, economic, and psychological well-being of a gender variant person. In India till now we don't have any specific policy to safeguard gender variant persons from discrimination and further no mention of protection of gender variant rights in the existing Acts w.r.t to children and which are gender specific. For e.g., Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, Domestic Violence Act, etc. The lack of public policy that addresses the needs of transgenders creates significant hardships for them (Taylor, 2007). So initiation of educating about gender sensitiveness and advocacy to create policy level changes is very much needed

to promote anti-trans prejudice and safer school and home environments for Transgender students (Singh & Burnes, 2009); as well as to assist TGNC people in accessing relevant social service systems to lead a better quality of life.

### **Rationale**

In India, the studies apart from health issues of gender variants are very less; and even within this less explored areas the studies mostly focused on the issues pertaining to transferred gender identity such as accessibility to higher education employment rights and other rights for social justice. This is more often than not done before ascertaining their transgender or gender variant identity, where the child lives in the dominant gender system which is often less supportive and more destructive of one's self esteem and acceptance. Thus this sphere is less touched upon. So in such a case how does society respond to the educational attainment of the gender variant person? The paper's focus is thus to explore the factors that influence the educational attainment of the gender variant person. Conducive environment is presumed as essential for any person to ascertain or to accomplish, for which appropriate support system is necessary. The key influential factor linked in the attainment of education of children primarily is family and school is secondary, because these two major factors are considered as pillars in the development of a child which nurtures, trains, motivates and develops them as a person. In this paper, the family and school are taken as supportive systems for the accessibility and attainment of education and analysed with factorial findings of the study to understand the

role played by them in the educational attainment of the gender variant person.

### **Methods**

The study was conducted among 85 gender variant persons, male to female transgenders in Chennai and Tamil Nadu, between the age group of 18 - 35 years to explore their experience of accessibility and attainment of education. The age composition of respondents is 7 respondents below 20 years, 49 respondents between 20 to 30 years and 29 respondents were between 30 - 35 years. A semi structured interview schedule was used for data collection. Personal interviews were conducted for each respondent by the researcher; and to cover qualitative aspect, open ended questions were used in the tool. To identify the respondents, various NGOs were approached and key contact persons' information were collected. Help of key informants were taken to identify the respondents. Considering the purpose of the study and practical difficulties, purposive sampling via snowball technique was used to ensure the reach of respondents as well as to gain appropriate data. SPSS was used for analysis of data and logistic regression and chi-square tests were used to check the significant association between variables.

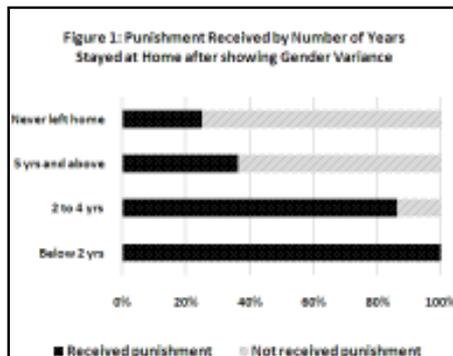
### **Findings**

**Gender Formation and Family Response:** Nearly 86% (58 respondents) of the respondents identified their desirability of gender variance before the completion of 12 years; of the 58 respondents 24 were identified by others for their gender variance only above 13 years. This could be understood only

during adolescent period because of a heightened awareness where gendered rules are strictly made to be adhered to (Maayan, 2003). Nearly 45.9% of the respondents left home before completing 18 years; however 18.8% (16 respondents) never left home. The most important factor that influenced the longer years of stay at home is the felt supportiveness from parents and less recurrent of punishment. Out of 85 respondents, 68% of the respondents were punished for their gender non-conforming behavior and compelled to comply with norms of gender and sex. Only one respondent got accepted in his family with gender variance which helped him to complete his graduation. However interestingly 14 respondents (17%) said their behaviours were not noticed or ignored by their parents. By doing so the parents created space to nurture normal boy life patterns without intimidating.

From the nativity of the respondents, it was observed 41 respondents were natives of Chennai but only 24 respondents have replied that they are living with family. Thus it could be inferred from this that 41% of the respondents are living in their hometown but not living with their family. This points towards the stigma faced by the respondent in their family as well as in the society. The most obvious factor elicited is that living with friends is considered as the most viable option for the respondents irrespective of their nativity. Hostile environment in the family is one of the major reasons cited by 51% of the respondents for leaving home and leads to the preference of staying with friends. 13% of the respondents left home in search of

transgender peer groups which could also be interpreted that the sense of belongingness and oneness was not felt in their family and society which leads to search for their identity. 16 (19%) respondents had never left their homes. So from reasons for leaving home and family response towards gender non-conforming behavior, it could be interpreted that when there is less punishment and acceptance the respondents never left home. When the person leaves home it not only affects the family ties but this curtails his/her opportunity to continue their education. Because when the gender variant person came out of home he/she not only searches for a place to stay but also has to create his/her income generating activities for their living. So, the number of years of staying at home directly influences the continuation of education and other life roles that the person can play.



**Influential Factors on the Educational Experience of Gender Variant Persons at Home :** Figure 1 reveals almost 100% of the respondents received punishment among those who stayed for less than 2 years after showing gender variance behaviour. On the other hand, 64% of the respondents stayed back at home for more than 5 years, and 75% never left

home. They never received punishment too. However, 25% of the respondents never left home and 36.3% of the respondents stayed at home for more than 5 years, even though they received punishment. In other words, it could be stated that when the parents have shown a punishing attitude towards gender variance behavior, the number of years of staying back at home decreases.

Irrespective of gender variance, one influential factor plays a key role in attainment of education, i.e., patriarchal value system which creates a strong desire for a male child. So, in a family when there is only a male child that happens to be a gender variant. In such cases, the desire to keep the child at home is higher which directly influences the number of years stayed at home after showing gender variance, which eventually impacted the attainment of education. When the respondent is a single male child in the family, then 66% of them were able to attain education upto higher secondary and above, where none of them were left with only primary level education. On the other hand, in the case of families which has another male child apart from the respondent, the level of educational attainment decreases. In case, if they have more than two male siblings present in the family then only 20% of the respondents were able to attain above high school and 80% were below elementary level. Further, none of such respondents have attained above higher secondary level. So irrespective of gender variance, if the variant is a single male child then higher priority was given to his education. This clearly exhibits the ingrained patriarchal value system.

Logistic regression method was adopted

to see the behaviour of parents towards gender variant persons. Parents' attitude towards the gender variant person is taken as the dependent variable. Education level of parents and number of siblings were taken as the independent variables. If the odds ratio is higher than 1, it indicates that there is a higher chance of utilization; whereas less than 1 indicates a lower chance of utilization. Parents education was categorized into 3 types such as illiterate, low education level (sum value of the parents education 1-5), high education level (sum value of the parents education 5-10). Siblings were divided into 2 categories, namely; i) families that are having 0-1 sibling, and ii) families having more than one sibling. While keeping the illiterate level as reference category, result showed that parents with higher education has a higher chance of showing positive attitude towards persons showing gender variant behaviour (Odds ratio= 4.4) and this result is statistically significant. In case of siblings, we see negative relationship between higher number of sibling and positive attitude towards gender variant persons. It means that more the number of siblings, lower is the positive attitude towards the gender variant person. However, this result is not statistically significant.

***Influential Factors on the Educational Experience of Gender Variant Persons at School :*** From the respondents, it was identified that the lower the level of education, the lesser the importance that was given to gender variance and the gender expectation arises during adolescence only. In the primary school, 92% of the classmates were supportive and only 8% were non-

supportive. Meanwhile in the middle school, only 42% were supportive and 68% were non-supportive. In high school, only 13% of the classmates were supportive and in the higher secondary only 12% were supportive. In other words, as the level of education increases the level of support received by gender variant person from peers decreased. The common belief is that higher the education, higher will be the social awareness and sensitivity, but it proves to be wrong in the case of gender variance. The biasness and stereotypic notion continues to exist or even increases with their age and education level. In a national community survey of TGNC adults, 15% reported prematurely leaving educational settings ranging from kindergarden through college as a result of harassment (Grant et al., 2011).

**Table 2: Opinion about Discontinuation**

| Cause of Discontinuation | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree    | Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| Physical abuse           | 12(14%)           | 51(60%)  | 15 (18%) | 7(8%)          |
| Verbal abuse             | 4(4%)             | 5(6%)    | 22(26%)  | 54(64%)        |
| Emotional abuse          | 4(4%)             | 10(12%)  | 41(48%)  | 30(35%)        |
| Sexual abuse             | 4(4%)             | 16(19%)  | 25(30%)  | 40(47%)        |
| Felt unsafe              | 4(4%)             | 38(45%)  | 23(27%)  | 20(24%)        |
| Felt ashamed             | 4(4%)             | 9(11%)   | 29(34%)  | 43(51%)        |
| Felt isolated            | 4(4%)             | 12(14%)  | 31(37%)  | 38(45%)        |

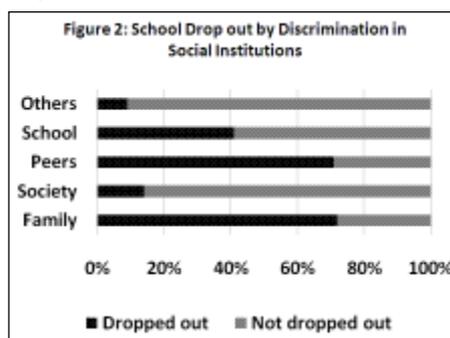
Almost 80% of the respondents faced more than one abusive situation by their schoolmates. The instance of physical abuse is low when compared to other sorts of abuse and verbal emotional and sexual abuses were most common among 80% of the respondents (Table 2). In an assessment of LGBT students, it was found that two out of three cases started with verbal abuse in the 7th grade. By the time adolescents reach

high school age, violence often becomes more extreme and dangerous for non-heterosexual youth, and much more difficult to contain (Ryan and Rivers, 2003). Only one respondent who discontinued at primary school never faced any abuse and discontinued due to financial constraint. It could be understood that schools are not providing a safe and protective environment of learning for the gender variant children. Facing abusive situation at school is a daily threat for the children and leaves negative thoughts on schooling which can unambiguously affect the education attainment of gender variant children.

**Table 3: Teachers' Attitudes & Discontinuation**

| Types of Attitudes         | Disagree   | Agree      |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| Complaining to Parents     | 67 (78.8%) | 18 (21.2%) |
| Ridiculing and Insulting   | 53 (62.4%) | 32 (38.6%) |
| Differential treatment     | 53 (62.4%) | 32 (38.6%) |
| Faced abusive circumstance | 46 (54.1%) | 39 (45.9%) |

Nearly 44 respondents felt that the teachers' attitudes were non supportive and discriminative. This is one of the major factors that contributed to children



dropping out from school. Though complaining to parents about the non-confirmative behavior had an impact, only 21% said it contributed to dropping out of school.

The above Figure 2 depicts the

discriminative approach of social circles on gender variance and its contribution in the decision of drop out from school. To understand the degrees of discrimination by various social settings and their role in discontinuation of schooling, the respondents were given the freedom to choose more than one agency which leads to their dropouts. Discrimination in the family and peers emerged as a main reason for school dropout of gender variants. More than 70% of the respondents felt that discrimination in the family and peers only lead to school dropouts. The next agency that played an influential role in school drop out of the respondents was the school itself, where nearly 41% of the respondents said that non conducive school environment leads to their school dropout. So, more than society and others, family and the school environment including teachers and peers are highly influential in determining the educational attainment of the gender variant person.

In order to see the relationship between the "Educational attainment of gender variant person and sum value of support of peers", chi-square test is administered. The Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 2.03 (value of  $p=0.362$ ), since the  $\chi^2$  value is not significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), we can reject the null hypothesis that the educational attainment of gender variant person is independent of the sum value of the support of peers. In other words, the education attainment of gender variant person is not related with the sum value of support of peers. So, even if they have attained higher education, they do not tend to support the gender variant person; their biasness and stereotypic notion continue to exist.

## **Conclusion**

Ostracization and isolation from their close knit community is the first major factor that affects the gender variant person's self-development. Since they always find it difficult to feel a sense of belongingness and support from family, they often end up running away from home at an early age which directly affects the educational attainment and forces them to engage in work from a very early age. The stigmatization faced by the gender variant person could be a manifestation of lack of awareness about gender variance and presence of insensitiveness towards their issues and concerns. This not only affects the social and economic life of gender variant person but also creates a long lasting impact in their psychological wellbeing. Next to family, the highest response received as a reason for dropping out of school was abuse and harassment by non-gender variant peers at school. Adding to peers' intolerance, the insensitiveness and lack of awareness of teachers may accelerate or aggravate the chances of abuse faced by a gender variant person at school and can make the school environment non-conducive. As with family, pressures at school lead to further isolation of the gender variant youth. Irrespective of their educational qualifications, the gender variant persons were able to find employment using the male identity whereas after expressing their trans-behavior, even the educated were not able to find appropriate and meaningful employment with the right compensation. It could be concluded that these factors, i.e., family, school, peers, and employment play a crucial role in determining the motivation and strive towards education.

Thus the issues faced by a gender variant person is multi-faceted. They are socially ostracized, economically suppressed, psychologically shattered, and legally criminalised by the current social structure and policy. So it needs a holistic approach to make better living for the gender variant person. It is essential to bring a positive attitude and sensitiveness in the larger society because various studies quoted that societal pressure creates a major impact as well as influences the decision of accepting the gender variant person. Hence the acceptance by larger society can ease the family acceptance of gender variant persons. A feeling of acceptance in the family shall directly increase the number of years of staying at home, which in turn will create more opportunities for better education as well as employment and also raise the self-esteem of the person. From the data, it has been clearly exemplified that supportiveness of teachers and peers play a key role next to the family in determining the continuation of education. So along with awareness, proper counseling and abuse redressal system needs to be initiated at the school to make an enabling and protective environment for gender variant children. Currently, there is no special policy to identify the needs of gender variant persons or even provisions for gender variant persons in the existing policies. All the existing policies are aimed either for males or females and the person who does not fit in to the binary system were forced to fit in to either of the sexes otherwise it will be difficult to ascertain any rights or provision entitled under the policy. The uniqueness of their issues are often ignored. Hence, proper policies

for inclusive education and employment can help in higher attainment of education, provide healthy competition and equal opportunity to all, and an abuse-free school and work environment. It is thus emphasized that only by accomplishing a political, legal, social, and cultural transformation can we make an equitable society for all, and bring in the transgenders into our routine world.

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**Corresponding Author**

G. Neathravathi, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Loyola College, Chennai - 600034. Tamil Nadu. Email: neathra@gmail.com

## Role of SHGs towards Women Empowerment in Lucknow

K. ANBUMANI

*Institute of Co-operative and Corporate Management Research and Training (ICCMRT), Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh*

*This paper is an attempt to examine the overall empowerment of women who are members of various Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Lucknow district of Uttar Pradesh. It thus intends to analyze the social, economic and psychological impact of the SHG membership on the lives of its members in the study area. It also attempts to identify the hardships women face as they embark on this process of women empowerment and offers meaningful suggestions to overcome the same. The paper demonstrates that the membership in SHGs when properly utilized has made significant impact in the lives of the women and thereby has ushered in a considerable level of empowerment among the women in the study area.*

### Introduction

In the ever changing horizon of social life, the status of women often remains a fluctuating one. The word 'women' which once stood as a decorative piece in the house of a male dominated society is now a relic of the past. Today, women in almost all walks of life have started shouldering responsibilities on par with their male counterparts; be it the family or society. However the picture is not so alluring everywhere.

It is generally accepted that women are disproportionately represented among the world's poorest people. Women also make up the majority of the lower paid, unorganized, informal sectors of most economies. They are often excluded from education, the work place, owning property and active participation in politics. Ironically, they produce one half of the world's food, but own just one% of its farmlands.

If a woman should be empowered, she needs to be given equal access to resources (financial, human and social

resources), equal opportunities to education, employment etc., which are necessary to enable her to make strategic choices in her life.

However, access to resources alone would not automatically bring empowerment or equality. For these resources to empower women, they must be able to use them for the purpose that they choose. Sociologists refer to this 'ability of using resources effectively' by the term 'agency'.

The term agency describes the processes of decision making, negotiation and manipulation required for women to use resources effectively. Women who have been excluded from decision making for most of their lives often lack this sense of agency that allows them to define goals and act effectively to achieve them. There arises the need for the intervention of a third party (say the Governments, NGOs, SHGs, etc.) who can entrust the women with such power of 'agency'. In this context, the present paper discusses the role of SHGs towards the achievement of women empowerment

from the economic, social and psychological angles of women's lives in Lucknow District of Uttar Pradesh.

### **Women Empowerment**

The concept of empowerment is defined as the process by which women take control and ownership of their choices. The core elements of empowerment have been defined as agency (the ability to define one's goals and act upon them), awareness of gendered power structures, self-esteem and self-confidence (Kabeer, 2001).

Empowerment can take place in a hierarchy at different levels - individual, household, community and societal - and is facilitated by providing encouraging factors (e.g. exposure to new activities which can build capacities) and removing the inhibiting factors (e.g. lack of resources and skills).

Thus, the term 'Women Empowerment' can be defined as "a change in the context of a woman's life, which enables her with an increased capacity for leading a satisfying human life. It gets reflected both through external qualities (viz., health, mobility, education, awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making, & material security) as well as internal qualities (viz., self-awareness & self-confidence)".

### **Self Help Groups (SHGs)**

A SHG is a small voluntary association of poor people, preferably from the same socio-economic background. They come together for the purpose of solving their common problems through self-help and mutual help. The SHGs promote small savings amongst its members. The savings are kept with

a bank. This common fund is in the name of the SHG fund which can be used for financing various socio-economic endeavours of the members. Usually, the number of members in one SHG does not exceed twenty. SHGs in India were introduced in the 1980s which is simply a replication of the Grameen Bank's model of Bangladesh. The SHG movement has been more successful in the south Indian States especially Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Currently, there are 69,843 voluntary organizations (VOs)/registered Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Of this, 474 are currently functioning in Lucknow alone focusing their activities in the formation and co-ordination of women SHGs with a goal to assist the women members to uplift their lives. The present study is an attempt in this direction to analyze the impact of SHGs on the lives of women in Lucknow district of Uttar Pradesh.

### **Study Area**

The multicultural state of Uttar Pradesh plays a key role in the economic development of India as it also tops the chart as the most populous state of India. It currently accommodates over 215 million people (16% of India's total population). Every year, the state adds around 3 to 4 million people in its population which is considered to be very high compared with the population growth rate of any other state in the country. This huge population lives in the 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh.

Lucknow is the state capital of Uttar Pradesh and the second largest city after Kanpur. As per Census 2011 its

population is 4,589,838 of which male and female were 2,394,476 and 2,195,362 respectively. The Sex ratio is 917 (National Average 940). The average literacy level in Lucknow is 77.29 (National Average 74.04%) of which male literacy is marked as 82.56% (National Average 82.14%) and female literacy 71.54% (National Average 65.46%).

As far as the status of women is concerned, the state has to go a long way as most of the women in the state still suffer a lot due to poor literacy, inadequate employment and income opportunities, ever increasing crimes and violence against women, inadequate health support, low awareness of sanitation and hygiene, low entrepreneurial skills and low access to resources.

The Government of Uttar Pradesh has taken several steps to ensure safety and equal growth opportunities to women in the state. For example, the 1090 special women power line project funded by the Government of Uttar Pradesh (since November 2012), which is a toll free helpline for women being harassed with obscene calls or being subjected to any form of eve-teasing, aims at helping girls and women from harassment caused to them primarily because of gender insensitivity. It has announced educational assistance with a view to promote girl education (for example the *kanya vidya dhan*). However, the efforts and contributions made by the Government agencies alone could not fulfill the huge task of women empowerment of this largest populated state. Thus, the role of NGOs and SHGs is enormously desirable and highly significant in promoting

women's safety, development and empowerment.

### **Objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to examine the role and performance of SHGs in promoting women's empowerment in the area. The study also aims to analyze the level of impact of SHG membership on the lives of the women members. The specific objectives are:

- (i) To analyze the social, economic and psychological advantages derived by the target members after joining the SHGs; and
- (ii) To assess the level of satisfaction and involvement of the target respondents with regard to the SHG services.

### **Sampling**

It is an empirical study representing the entire district of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Lucknow consists of 8 administrative blocks namely BakshiKaTalab, Chinhat, Gosainganj, Kakori, Mal, Malihabad, Mohanlalganj and Sarojini Nagar. BakshiKaTalab and Mohanlalganj Blocks were purposefully selected as sample blocks after considering the chances for easy accessibility of data and the associated time constraints.

Twenty SHGs (10 from each block) constituting 100 women respondents (5 members from each group respectively) were selected for the study purpose using simple random sampling technique. The required information pertaining to the current study was collected through field surveys, by administering the structured interview schedules. The study was conducted

during the period March-April 2015.

### Tools

In order to gather the primary data, field surveys were conducted using structured interview schedules. In addition, data were also collected through discussions and interviews with local NGOs and grass root level workers of Government agencies. Secondary data gathered from the records of SHGs and NGOs and government offices were supplemented by the primary data collected from the group members. Besides different books, newspapers, journal articles, etc. were also referred for the study purpose.

**Table 1: Structure of SHGs**

| Particulars                        | Bakshika Talab | Mohan lalganj |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Average Membership                 | 18             | 17            |
| Saving per SHG                     | Rs. 14,528     | Rs.16,227     |
| Loans Disbursed to Members         | Rs. 22,752     | Rs.27,178     |
| Frequency of Group Meetings (in %) |                |               |
| 1. Weekly                          | 12             | 16            |
| 2. Fortnightly                     | 62             | 60            |
| 3. Monthly                         | 26             | 24            |

### Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected from each block regarding the structure and profile of SHG memberships, savings and loan details of members, economic and social benefits derived by members, etc. have been separately processed block wise and the results obtained are compared with each other in order to assess the impact of SHG membership in the lives of the women in the study area.

Table 1 indicates the structure and functioning of SHGs in the study area. As per the table, the average membership per SHG is 18 and 17 in BakshiKaTalab and Mohanlalganj blocks respectively. The Mohanlalganj

block is slightly ahead of BakshiKaTalab block with reference to the savings generated by SHG members as well as the average loan disbursed to the members. The frequency of group meetings held by SHGs indicates that in both of the sample blocks, the fortnightly meetings are the most popular ones followed by the monthly and weekly meetings. Meetings are usually arranged with the guidance of the patron NGOs.

Table 2 illustrates the socio-economic profile of SHG members in the study area. As per the data, the average age of SHG members is 33 and 35 in Bakshi Ka Talab and Mohanlalganj blocks respectively. The lowest being 32 years in Bakshi Ka Talab and the highest 37 years in Mohanlalganj block. Most of the members in these SHGs are educated up to primary level and significant numbers of members are illiterates also. Around one third of the members belong to Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes. Majority of them are engaged in

**Table 2: Profile of SHG Member**

| Particulars                                   | Bakshika Talab | Mohan lalganj |
|---|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Average Age                                | 33             | 35            |
| 2. SC/ST Members (%)                          | 34             | 38            |
| 3. Other Categories (%)                       | 66             | 62            |
| <b>Literacy level of Women Members (in %)</b> |                |               |
| 1. Illiterates                                | 27             | 30            |
| 2. Upto Primary Level                         | 42             | 42            |
| 3. High School & Above                        | 31             | 28            |
| <b>Occupation Status of Members (in %)</b>    |                |               |
| 1. Daily Wage Earners                         | 32             | 28            |
| 2. Others                                     | 68             | 72            |
| Average Family Income                         | Rs.7,367       | Rs. 8,223     |
| Savings (%)                                   | 22             | 28            |
| <b>Debt Liabilities (in %)</b>                |                |               |
| 1. Banks                                      | 26             | 20            |
| 2. Local Money Lenders                        | 68             | 71            |
| 3. Others                                     | 6              | 9             |

agriculture and allied activities as daily wage earners. Around 30% of the members of these SHGs still rely on the financial support of local money lenders for their short term financial needs.

Table 3 shows the purpose wise credit demand of SHG members in the study area. The top 3 purposes for availing credit were domestic consumption (37%), income generating activities (28%) and repayment of old debts (20%) in Bakshi Ka Talab block. In case of Mohanlalganj block also the same purposes have been found leading such as income generating activities (39%), domestic consumption (32%) and repayment of old debts (14%).

**Table 3: Credit Demanded by Women SHG Members**

| Purpose of Credit                            | Bakshi Ka Talab | Mohan lalganj |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
| Domestic Consumption (food, cloth, festival) | 37              | 32            |
| Income Generating Activities                 | 28              | 39            |
| Health & Physical Well Being                 | 10              | 9             |
| Repayment of Old Dues                        | 20              | 14            |
| Others                                       | 5               | 6             |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>100</b>      | <b>100</b>    |

Table 4 depicts the number of women members involved in different income generating activities in the study area. It is evident from the data that barring the members engaged in agricultural and other activities at least 70% of the members in BKT block (it is 78% in Mohanlalganj block) are actively involved in any one or more of the income generating activities such as manufacturing, running of kirana shops, vegetable vending, tailoring, weaving,

**Table 4: No. of Women Members Involved in Different Income Generating Activities**

| Activities Undertaken Credit | Bakshi Ka Talab | Mohan lalganj   |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Agriculture/Allied           | 11 (22.0)       | 8(16.0)         |
| Manufacturing                | 14(28.0)        | 16(32.0)        |
| Kirana Shop, etc             | 9(18.0)         | 8(16.0)         |
| Tailoring                    | 8(16.0)         | 6(12.0)         |
| Weaving, Chikan Kari Works   | -               | 5(10.0)         |
| Cloth Sales                  | 4(8.0)          | 4(8.0)          |
| Others                       | 4(8.0)          | 4(8.0)          |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>50(100%)</b> | <b>50(100%)</b> |

handicrafts, chikankari works, sale of garments, etc.

At least 28% of respondents from Bakshi Ka Talab block (32% in Mohanlalganj block) were found involved in manufacturing of papad, masala powder, candle, pickle, etc. followed by 18% of women running kirana shops (16% in Mohanlalganj block) and 16% of the respondents doing tailoring business (12% in Mohanlalganj block) with the assistance and guidance of the SHGs. Some member respondents from Mohanlalganj block are involved in weaving and chikankari works also (nil in case of Bakshi Ka Talab).

Table 5 depicts the average monthly income earned by women members of the selected SHGs. As per the table, in

**Table 5: Earning through Income Generating Activities**

| Monthly Income (In Rs.) | Bakshi Ka Talab  | Mohan lalganj    |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Below Rs. 3000          | 6(12.0)          | 5(10.0)          |
| Rs.3001- Rs.4000        | 12(24.0)         | 21(42.0)         |
| Rs.4001- Rs.5000        | 22(44.0)         | 6(12.0)          |
| Rs.5001- Rs.6000        | 5(10.0)          | 7(14.0)          |
| Above Rs.6000           | 5(10.0)          | 11(22.0)         |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>50 (100%)</b> | <b>50 (100%)</b> |

BakshiKaTalab block, a leading count of 44% sample respondents (12% in Mohanlalganj block) have earned an average monthly income of Rs.4001-Rs.5000 followed by 24% respondents (42% in Mohanlalganj block) with an earning ranging between Rs.3001-Rs.4000. There are instances that at least 10% of member respondents in Bakshi Ka Talab block (22% in Mohanlalganj block) whose average monthly income is even more than Rs.6000.

Table 6 shows a comparative analysis of change in income of women members of the select SHGs of the sample blocks. From the table, it is imperative that the average monthly income of the members has significantly increased in the SHGs of both the blocks.

In Bakshi Ka Talab block, the average monthly income of 19 out of 50 respondents before SHG membership was below Rs.3000 and after the SHG membership only 10 out of 50 respondents are earning less than Rs.3000 per month which indicates the monthly income of the rest of the members have significantly increased thereafter. This is clearly indicated in the table as the number of respondents earning a monthly income of Rs. 5001-Rs.6000 has increased from 4 to 11 after SHG membership of the respondents. Similarly the number of respondents earning more than Rs.6000 has also tripled from 2 to 6 after SHG membership.

Similarly, in Mohanlalganj block, the average monthly income of 22 out of 50 respondents before SHG membership was below Rs.3000; and after the SHG membership only 12 out of 50 respondents are earning less than

Rs.3000 per month. Further, the number of respondents earning a monthly income of Rs. 5001-Rs.6000 has increased from 6 to 7 and the number of respondents earning more than Rs.6000 has also doubled from 3 to 6 after SHG membership.

**Table 6: Change in Income Before & After Membership**

| Income Range     | Bakshi Ka Talab Block |           | Mohan lalganj Block |           |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
|                  | Before                | After     | Before              | After     |
| Below Rs. 3000   | 19                    | 10        | 22                  | 12        |
| Rs.3001- Rs.4000 | 16                    | 13        | 11                  | 12        |
| Rs.4001- Rs.5000 | 9                     | 10        | 8                   | 13        |
| Rs.5001- Rs.6000 | 4                     | 11        | 6                   | 7         |
| Above Rs.6000    | 2                     | 6         | 3                   | 6         |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>50</b>             | <b>50</b> | <b>50</b>           | <b>50</b> |

Table 7. describes the monthly expenditure pattern of the women respondents before and after their membership in the said SHGs in the study area.

**Table 7: Monthly Expenditure**

| Monthly Expenditure   | Bakshi Ka Talab Block |             | Mohan lalganj Block |              |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------|
|                       | Before                | After       | Before              | After        |
| Food                  | 740<br>(30)           | 858<br>(26) | 918<br>(28)         | 1051<br>(24) |
| Shelter               | 370<br>(15)           | 396<br>(12) | 656<br>(20)         | 658<br>(15)  |
| Education             | 395<br>(16)           | 594<br>(18) | 492<br>(15)         | 788<br>(18)  |
| Health & Hygiene      | 346<br>(14)           | 528<br>(16) | 426<br>(13)         | 657<br>(15)  |
| Transport & Fuel      | 198<br>(8)            | 231<br>(7)  | 262<br>(8)          | 352<br>(8)   |
| Cloth, Festivals, Etc | 246<br>(10)           | 264<br>(8)  | 296<br>(9)          | 360<br>(8)   |
| Saving / Investments  | 173<br>(7)            | 429<br>(13) | 230<br>(7)          | 512<br>(12)  |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>2468</b>           | <b>3300</b> | <b>3280</b>         | <b>4378</b>  |

(Figures in parentheses indicate%)

In Bakshi Ka Talab block, the average monthly expenditure spent on education has increased from 16% to 18% during the study period. Similarly the income spent on health and hygiene related purposes have also increased from 14% to 16% after SHG membership. The increase in the level of savings and investments from 7% to 13% after SHG membership is also worth to be noted here.

In Mohanlalganj block, the average monthly expenditure spent on education has increased from 15% to 18% during the study period. Similarly the income spent on health and hygiene related purposes have also increased from 13% to 15% after SHG membership. The increase in the level of savings and investments from 7% to 12% after SHG membership is also worth to be noted here.

## Findings

**1. Social Composition:** The social profile of SHG members indicates that majority of the respondents fall in the category between primary to high school educated, yet a significant number of member beneficiaries in these sample SHGs are illiterates also. Similarly around one third of the women members of these SHGs belong to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. By empowering these illiterate, ignorant masses the SHGs have been doing an impeccable job.

**2. Income generation:** In BakshiKa Talab block 28% of the respondents (32% in Mohanlalganj block) were engaged in the production of washing powder, masala powder, papad and pickle manufacturing etc. A significant number of member respondents have

involved themselves in various other types of income generating activities such as running of kirana shops, tailoring shops, weaving, garments sales etc.

**3. Changes in Family Income:** Majority of the family incomes of the respondents before joining the groups was below Rs.3000 which has shifted upward to the range of Rs. 4001- 6000 after joining the SHGs. Some respondents have even earned an average monthly income more than Rs.6000. The sample respondents have also reported that their income earned from the activities undertaken in SHGs as the main sources of their income.

**4. Changes in Expenditure Pattern:** The major change observed in the expenditure pattern of the SHG members indicates a significant reduction in the expenditure related to food and shelter. Similarly there is a significant increase in the expenditure towards education, health and savings also before and after joining the SHGs which is a healthy indicator of women empowerment. The same is true in the cases of BakshiKaTalab and Mohanlalganj blocks.

**5. Self-confidence and Decision-making:** The study also has observed that the self-confidence and decision making power of the respondents after joining the SHGs has changed drastically. After joining the groups, majority of the respondents have reported that their decision making power as well as their confidence levels have significantly improved.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

In view of the findings of the study, the

following suggestions have been made.

- ♦ Women members should be given adequate guidance and counseling to think of occupational mobility and to increase their incomes with the twin objectives of crossing the poverty line and to ensure a sustainable development.
- ♦ Periodical exhibitions at block levels may be organized where the products of SHGs can be displayed and thereby create better marketing opportunities and facilities for the SHG products.
- ♦ Women must be empowered through training in various areas such as rights and gender awareness and consumerism. In this process the NGOs should act as a facilitator and motivator.

It can be concluded that the membership to the SHGs has demonstrated a significant impact in the social, economic and psychological aspects of the lives of the member respondents in the study area. Thus their role in women empowerment has become an impeccable one.

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### **Corresponding Author**

K. Anbumani, Associate Professor, Institute of Co-operative and Corporate Management Research and Training (ICCMRT), Lucknow - 226016 Uttar Pradesh.

Email: anbumani.iccmrt@gmail.com

## Occupational Change and its Possible Implications on Artisan Families

**CHAYAN DEB**

*Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Assam*

**GANGABHUSHAN M. MOLANKAL**

*Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Assam*

*Changes in traditional occupations are apparently occurring to a large extent. Such changes are not only observed by the number of population engaged in a particular occupation but also include changes in the relationship among the members of a family. With the advent of globalisation, it has been influencing the economies of various countries by orienting them to a global market. This process has given an impetus to various alterations at the occupational level among the rural artisans. As a socio-economic group, artisans are amongst the poorest. Research shows that households headed by artisans, in general have much lower net wealth and most of them are landless. In the wake of constant struggles, most of the artisans, especially men of the families have abandoned and moved away from their traditional occupations. It results in overburden on the female counterparts of the family due to the need to oversee both household chores and artisanal activities. Occupational change has a direct bearing on the structural and functional aspects of artisan families. This paper is thus an attempt to highlight the changing nature of occupation, production of artisanal goods, and its possible implications on the gender relations among artisan family members.*

### **I**ntrouduction

Occupational change is a change in the activities of the members of the society to earn their livelihood. The change is observed by the increase and decrease in the distribution of these activities in the socio economic structure of a society. But occupational change does not only signify the changes in the number of population engaged in particular activities. Change can be inferred if there are changes in the social relationship of the people engaged in those activities to earn their livelihoods (Desai, 1971). The sustenance of any family largely depends upon the extent of different roles assigned to each individual. Based on these role expectations, activities are

identified among each member of the family as well as society. Every member in a family is interdependent and their relationship amongst them is developed based on this interdependency. So it is obvious that every role performed by each member of the family directly or indirectly signifies the relationship among them. Occupational change cannot be understood without understanding the changes in such relationships. Relationship among the members of the family is one major aspect of the entire structure and functions of the family system. Occupational change is also closely related to other structural and functional aspects of the family which normally designates positions, roles, and norms

of interaction for each family member.

### **Artisans in India**

As a socio-economic group, artisans are amongst the poorest. Government policies since the early twentieth century have emphasized in generating employment and increasing earnings through export of crafts. However, in spite of this, most of the artisans live in adverse situations. Though some of them have managed to adapt with the situation, they continue to live in poverty with no prospects for a better tomorrow. But in the face of constant struggle, most of the artisans especially men of the families have given up and moved away from their traditional occupations.

In spite of being large manufacturing sector with a huge success in exports, this sector has many problems which are faced by the artisans. It is an irony that millions of artisans who produce these goods still struggle with the very basics of existence (Liebl and Roy, 2003).

The livelihood patterns in the rural areas have been affected due to the macrolevel economic factors. Industrialization which emphasized more on large scale industries has resulted in not recognizing the skills of the people which are more suitable for small scale industries. People dependent on agriculture in general and traditional artisanal activities in particular thus got affected drastically. The macroeconomic process had affected the traditional artisans largely, especially women. With low educational backgrounds, women tend to be confined to their tradition based occupations. In the wake of men shifting from traditional artisanal activities, women continued to remain confined to their tradition based traditional activities.

Rapid globalization and changing domestic preferences have brought the handicrafts' to face a unique set of challenges. Factory made products can usually be sold at lower prices than competing handmade products. For instance, in Barak Valley, artistic products like *ShitolPati* (mat) are very much common. But the artisans dependent on *ShitolPati* making are very less in number. Various problems like non availability of cane during the monsoon season, unavailability of any organization to support them financially persist. Due to lack of capital, artisans need to borrow money from merchants in advance and they add to the artisans' difficulties when the price for the products are fixed by the merchants. In addition to this, constant exploitations from merchants cause most of them to move away from their traditional occupation. So the skills which have been developed over thousands of years, are on the verge of disappearing. Research shows that neither the old generation nor the new generation wants to continue with their traditional occupations in India. Among the very few who are engaged in these occupations, it is due to lack of alternatives that have bound them to stick to the traditional occupations.

Besides, there is gradual change in buyer profile in domestic market. Earlier, the buyers used to be local villagers living in the place where the goods were made. But today the buyers are from the middle class with more flexible lifestyle and tastes. Moreover, the existence of middle men in India makes the products more costly. In this face of constant struggle, most of the artisans leave behind their traditional occupation. In the absence of

better alternatives, they choose to continue their traditional occupation. However, the traditional rural artisans who are still practicing the craft activities as their source of livelihood are going through a transitional period. There has been noticed a dramatic change in the livelihood strategies of artisanal families (Solanki 2002).

Various problems associated with the handicrafts sector are namely: (a) scarcity of working capital; (b) inadequacy of raw material supplies; (c) shortage of skilled labour (d) in appropriate technology, together with a variety of factors which can loosely be grouped under the term 'marketing problems'; (e) lack of design innovation; (f) delivery problems; and (g) over-dependence on existing markets. This is followed by an examination of some important issues in the development of handicrafts such as: (a) conditions of labour; (b) role of co-operatives; (c) urban bias; and (d) choice of technology (Vincent Cable and Ann Weston, 1982).

When the men of the family discontinue their traditional occupation and either migrate to any nearby urban area or become engaged as a wage laborer, engaging women of the family becomes an important livelihood strategy for a family. The women engage themselves in crafting for the basic subsistence of the family. Women now engage in all sorts of economic activities like producing as well as marketing of the products in the village as well as in any nearby urban areas (Krishnaraj, 1990). However it is evident from studies that there are changes with regards to economic activities of the female members of the family. But change is

not observed when it comes to the patriarchal nature of the family (Jetley, 1987). If the male member of the family migrates to other urban areas, the remittances sent by the male migrant members is not sufficient to run the family. The remittances do not substantially change the economic status of the family; rather it increases the burden of the females left behind. In addition to the familial and domestic responsibilities they have to act as a breadwinner, and older daughters have to take up the household chores and take on the role of mother to younger siblings.

#### **Possible Implication on Artisan families**

It can be understood from the above discussions that occupational changes among the rural artisans is an apparently occurring phenomena. If we consider the consequences of occupational changes of rural artisans, there are many which can be listed like burden of over population on other agricultural and allied activities, large numbers of migration from rural to urban communities, unemployment led by lack of skills and knowledge of rural community members in service sector, etc. These changes from caste oriented and hereditary occupations to other occupations in the informal sector can also leave their impact on the Indian family. Briefly speaking, the socio-economic and politico-cultural changes of the society has led to changes in the structures, functions, roles, relationships and values of the family.

It is to be noted that changes in the pattern of occupation can lead to changes in other aspects of the structure of the family. Changes in occupational

structures and patterns are one of those vital factors which are transforming the Indian family. Changes in traditional occupations can alter the role of each family member and it is significantly interrelated with the other structural and functional aspects of the family. Though there has been a shift from traditional caste and family occupations to others, it should be noticed whether these structural changes lead to any attitudinal changes. The structure of any artisanal family can be determined by interpreting its nature of ownership of property, authority in the family, gender roles and family occupation. These are discussed as follows.

#### **Control over Family Resources**

In the traditional Indian society, it is observed that the holding of family property remains in the hands of the male members of the family. Women in rural Indian families cannot access their rights in the ancestral property. They cannot decide anything regarding the buying or selling of property. The general notion is that women cannot decide as wisely as men. Holding the right to property is a very important criterion to understand the structure of any rural Indian family. Even today, in most of the agricultural families, responsibility of family and ownership of land are in the hands of male (Salunke, 2014).

Similarly, male dominated authority is one of those vital characters of any Indian rural family. Generally, the head of the family is considered to possess ultimate authority in any Indian rural family. In the absence of the father, the mother is considered as the authority of the family; but in most of the cases such

an authority of the latter kind remains symbolic. If the son is an adult he can hold the authority of the family. So women are abandoned with no power to decide anything for themselves as well as for their family.

Prior to the influence of globalization, family used to be the unit of production. There was a clear division of labor in which every task in the family was divided among all the members of the family. But now family is considered as only the unit of consumption. It means every member of the family is now performing different jobs for their livelihood. Even the situation is more different if a few members of the family move to other places for their livelihood. In that regard, family cannot even be considered as the unit of consumption. It is evident from studies that very few male members of the family are continuing their traditional artisanal activities with their migration to other urban areas. Some studies have also shown that roles which were traditionally allotted to different members of the family are now changing. Men are not practicing their traditional occupations anymore; but women and children become engaged in artisanal activities. Thus changes in roles also influence the structure of family such as authority and decision making capacity.

In the families where the male members have migrated to other places, the women take the major decisions regarding the daily subsistence of family but major decisions such as purchase and sale of land, expenditure on ceremonies, among other things, are made by men, when they visit home. Thus the authority of the house remains

unchanged even after male outmigration. The predominance of women in artisanal activities is as a matter of survival and is otherwise contributing to the sustainability of traditional knowledge and skills.

From the above, it is clear that continuous change in the occupation of rural artisans has given impetus to the changes in social relations. These changes are actually influencing structural as well as functional changes in the family. But these do not witness any attitudinal change among the members of artisanal families. Changes are observed in regards to changing of occupation and role among the members of the family. Nevertheless there has not been any change in the patriarchal nature of the family. Although female members of artisanal families in the absence of male members need to take care of both household and artisanal activities, they are not entitled to take any major decisions in their family. They neither can possess any property nor have the right to buy or sell any property. What we can observe is their increased burden in everyday life as a result of these role changes in livelihood options.

### **Gender Based Roles**

Family function is closely related to the family structure. On one hand, the family structures influences the family functions: the bigger the family is, more complexity it confronts, and more functions it usually undertakes. On the other hand, a family will also structurally adjust itself to its functional needs. It can be referred that Kingsley Davis who spoke about 'socialization', stated it as one of the functions of family. Nimkoff also mentioned about

'economic function of any family' as one of the very important functions of the family. So it has to be understood whether any changes in 'socialization' and 'economic function' of the family are happening due to occupational changes of the family.

In Indian families, gender roles are well differentiated and influence the socialization process from birth onwards. Socialization is largely influenced by nature of the family. Both boys and girls start developing feminine and masculine roles in their childhood and these become sharper gradually as the child grows up. When an artisanal family adopts any changing strategy to livelihood, women become victims with overburden of both familial and artisanal activities. Women in our Indian family have to carry out both the livelihood generated activities after maintaining all the household chores. There is no boundary of work in between household chores and other income generation activities. Absence of demarcation between the two makes the life of women in Indian artisanal family more cumbersome.

### **Family Occupation**

It has been observed earlier that all the family members were engaged in the same occupation and the male members of the artisanal families were engaged in producing artisanal goods. But the scenario has been changed. Now due to various reasons the artisans are moving to other occupations leaving behind their female family members at home. In the absence of husband and other male members, women are now engaging themselves in artisanal activities. There has been a shift of male members of the

family from artisanal to other activities and increasing burden on the female counterparts due to the need to oversee both family chores and artisanal activities.

It has also been noted above that all the structures of any artisanal family are inter-related to each other and one change in one structure can influence changes in the other structure. It can be better understood only by connecting the occupational strategies of artisanal families with the nature of ownership of family property and authority within and outside the family.

### **Observations**

The livelihood pattern in the rural areas got affected due to the macro level economic patterns. People dependent on agriculture in general and traditional artisanal activities in particular got affected drastically. Women with low educational status tend to be confined to their tradition based occupations. In the wake of men shifting from traditional artisanal activities, women are playing a significant role in sustaining the family economy. In the process, women are facing the devastating challenges from multiple roles, with limited returns. Effective interventions are needed to enhance the dire needs of artisan families especially women, to pave the way towards promoting their entrepreneurship skills which can eventually enhance their empowerment.

### **Scope for Social work Intervention**

Social workers can play a significant role through various participatory interactions with the artisanal family members and can perform multiple tasks to address the problems arising from

occupation among artisans. They are presented in detail in the following paragraphs.

### **Market Linkages for the Artisans**

Lack of marketing facility of products is one of the vital barriers which any artisan in India faces. In most of the cases in India, artisans do not have access to any good marketing platform for selling their products. This results in the middlemen taking the mileage, thus leaving the artisans to the vagaries of the market. A good market linkage to the traditional artisan renders opportunity and can also minimize the price of the products resulting in increased buying power of the customers. In view of the shortage of financial resources and small scale operations, advertising publicity cannot be undertaken by the artisans on their own. Corporations can play a significant role in advertising and publicity for all the crafts and save the artisans from the exploitative clutches of middlemen by proper monitoring.

There is a need for organizing constant interactive programmes, where artisans of a few communities can come forward to discuss about the various issues, prospects and problems associated with their livelihood. Social workers must initiate and generate awareness among community members to organize such joint meetings. One aspect of those programmes could be "Know the Artisans" which means encouraging the successful artisans to share their stories with other members. This will not only encourage the artisans but also show a path to success.

### **Promote Educational Awareness**

Social Workers can arrange programs

with the help of GOs like Registrar of Cooperatives, MSME, KVIC and other interested stakeholders like NGOs to work for artisans in sharing information and knowledge regarding the scope to uplift the quality of the artisanal products. They can work to enhance the functionality of the product which can appeal to a wider range of customers, especially the urban middle class people. This technical knowledge may not be provided by the social workers but they can definitely pave a way to enhance the quality of artisanal products. The artisans need to be trained to build good operational and marketing capabilities and this could be achieved through training by GOs and NGOs. They should be trained to understand their supply chain, cost structures, identifying markets, build marketing skills, budgetary skills, as well as monitoring and evaluation skills.

#### Formalization of Artisans

One of the major problems which is faced by the artisanal communities in India is their identity crisis. Most of the artisans in India are not registered either with a Government or any NGO. Thus they are unable to avail any services which are actually meant for them. They are not counted during any policy formulation because the exact number of artisans in India is unknown. Social workers can play a major role to locate the artisanal communities in India. They can help the artisans to register under office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), which can ultimately help the artisans to avail services under various schemes like *Rajiv Gandhi Shilpi Swasthya Bima Yojana* (RGSSBY), *Aam Admi Bima Yojana* for handicraft artisans, credit guarantee scheme,

interest subvention scheme etc.

#### **Promoting Collective Entrepreneurial Initiatives**

SHGs can be promoted for entrepreneurship development and pave a way towards giving value addition to their skills. By forming SHGs, artisans can be enlightened to know about the available avenues to strengthen their knowledge base of skills in effective utilization of the available resources. SHGs can help them get through financial institutions for their savings as well as access credit services. They develop the leadership quality which can ultimately help them to fight with any kind of exploitation. Development of oneness among all the members of the community is one of the functions of the SHGs. Social workers can help rural artisans to form SHGs and organise themselves towards effective marketing of their products. Social workers can also promote the formation of the market linkages for the artisans and systematic marketing networks can give wider scope to their products.

#### **Mainstreaming Gender Based Economic Inclusion**

Rural women engage in artisanal economic activities to ensure their families' food security. They contribute to artisanal and rural economies with their labor and valuable knowledge regarding artisanal activities. Women's increasing role in artistic activities could be an opportunity for enhancing their economic and social empowerment as producers, traders, workers and entrepreneurs. If women have the same access as men to extension services, technologies and loans, they can

contribute in improving the productivity of artisanal goods, engage in processing and marketing activities, and increase their voice in household decisions. SHGs and other organizations have a major role in building women's self-confidence, providing access to financial opportunities and training, and engaging in collective processing and marketing of products. When women control the additional income from their multiple activities, they usually spend it on their children (education, health and clothing) and improved nutrition and well-being for their families. Most importantly, women can sustain the traditional skills and knowledge and transfer this to next generation. There is thus a need to encourage the role of women to sustain the traditional skills and knowledge. They should be entitled to equal rights to access various government and non-government services. Moreover, it can widen the scope to cease the gap between male and female members of the artisanal families.

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### Corresponding Author

Gangabhushan M. Molankal, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar - 788011. Assam.  
Email: gangabhushan@gmail.com

## Being Meeshari: Globalisation and the Kolis of Mumbai

DELFI SIMON CHINNAPPAN

University of Hyderabad, Telangana

*It is essential for India to find ways to evade globalisation's 'development by displacement' strategy. Globalisation has morphed values and affairs that subtly propagate the subjugation of the marginalised. The fishing community has certainly been at the receiving end of such a growth curve. The infrastructure and hi-tech marine extraction machinery fostered by globalisation usurps the ecological, economic and cultural space of this community. Concretisation and pollution of marine resources through various infrastructure projects have reduced their economic earnings. Furthermore, reclamations have led to the inundation of their habitable areas along the coastal zones, forcing them to migrate inland towards the heart of the city which is away from the sea, thus adversely impacting their cultural land-sea relationship. Such displacement of these indigenous people calls for a socio-anthropological study so as to mainstream their plight and thereby reduce the ramifications that are induced by the forces and dynamics of globalisation. This paper attempts to study the impact of globalisation on the alienation of this community from their livelihoods, social location as well as their interactions and ultimately their culture. Along with probing into the role of international institutions, MNCs (Multi National Corporations) and the complementary state suppression on their socio-cultural well being, the paper will also examine the costs imposed by the subsequent neo-liberal policies on their right to self-determination as a society. The paper would also analyse the viability of government sponsored programmes like Fish Farmers' Development Agencies as well as those run by NGOs (Non Government Organisations) and Peoples' Alliances. Through secondary resources and a primary survey of the fishing community along the Mumbai coastline, the paper seeks to validate its position. In conclusion, the paper makes a critique of the existing systems and offer a few suggestions that could be taken up for further discussion.*

### Globalisation and Agencies

It is touted that globalisation has transformed the world into a 'global village'. However, the social dynamics of this 'global village economy' are highly selective and discriminating, as the economically vulnerable are at the receiving end. Such a treatment of the marginalised is driven by the market forces that are boosted by neo-liberal policies, which are inherently anti-poor in both design and intent. For the minority elite, globalisation, by

nurturing the sharing of natural resources among nations, claims that poverty would be alleviated as there would be an increase in production, an expansion of markets and the creation of a surplus. However, from the third world's perspective, globalisation has given developed nations the 'legitimacy' to exploit the developing nations' resources and wealth and consequently widening the rich-poor divide. In his Sophie Prize acceptance speech, Fr. Kocherry, the champion of the rights of the fishing communities in India, quoted

a UN (United Nations) study which pointed out that currently about 20% of humankind from the developed world enjoys 82.7% of world gross national product, 81.2% of world trade, 94.6% of all commercial lending, 80.5% of all domestic investment, 80.6% of all domestic savings and 94.0% of all research and development. (Suvarta 2009) Kocherry thus highlights the accumulation by dispossession tendency of globalisation as well as its potential to further marginalize the poor. As globalisation is fuelled by capital mobility, international institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, international commercial agencies like the World Trade Organisation and the Multi-National and Trans-National Companies, have not only gained reputation but have also succeeded in wresting control of the economic trajectories of the weaker nations (Jha, 2000). These adverse impacts of globalisation become very stark in the case of the traditional fishing communities in India, as they have been overtly and covertly victimized by such alienation processes. This paper investigates the plight of these communities as globalisation entrenches itself from coast to coast. It also generalizes the hardships of the fishing communities by concentrating on the Kolis, a traditional fishing community around the Mumbai agglomeration as the globalisation forces persist in converting Mumbai into a global financial hub.

Against the background of the Koli fishing community in Mumbai, certain questions about global trends need answers: What lies behind the garb of

globalisation? How is the agenda sustaining itself? The paper illustrates the issues of technological polarisation and turning commons into commodities. It invalidates the misconception that third world countries need development and cannot afford the luxury of shielding nature's ecological processes. It challenges the foremost partisan scientific knowledge as well as the widely accepted equation of economic development and economic growth and proposes holistic development and a movement of the marginalised. The methodology that this paper has adopted includes both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected in the form of an ethnographic survey, wherein interviews, discussions as well as observations were adopted to collect data.

### **The Mumbai Kolis**

Mumbai is named after the goddess Mumba, the deity of the Kolis, who consider themselves to be the original inhabitants of the Bombay islands. Keshavacharya (Punekar, 1959) refers to Son Kolis (The Son Kolis are 'golden Kolis', a Koli group higher in social status than other Koli groups) and their occupation of fishing is as early as 15 A.D. Fishing and allied activities therefore, for most Kolis is the only source of livelihood. In her ethnographic account of the Son Kolis of Bombay, Vijaya Punekar (1959) brings out the constant routine commercial transactions and interactions of the Kolis with neighbouring communities wherein surplus fish was traded for essentials like rice and clothing. Her observations indicate that market operations are not new to the Kolis. For this paper, what is

new today is that globalisation has made these economic relations exploitative and authoritarian. For instance, Koli men are traditionally involved in getting the catch and Koli women usually sell the catch in markets. But in recent times, migrants engage in door to door transaction service.

This has led to a loss of income for the Kolis. Hence, in many places, 'Bhaiya Hatao, Koli Mahila Bachao' (Bhaiya is a derogatory term for migrants coming into Mumbai from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They form the majority of the migrant population in Mumbai and invariably become a target group in Mumbai's urban conflicts. Here the slogan translates as 'Get rid of the Bhaiyas and save the Koli women') protests were led. Punekar also points out to the tendency of the Kolis to replicate the cultural groups that they came in contact with. The spread of western education due to globalisation has introduced the Kolis to mechanised boats, non-fishing jobs and the subsequent integration of the Koli culture with the urbanisation induced multi-ethnic culture.

### **Ecological Alienation**

Mumbai is bordered by the Arabian Sea to the west and the south, the Vasai creek to the north and the Thane creek to the east. The coast of Mumbai was formerly made up of sand beaches, mangrove forests and marshy lands. Today, land in Mumbai is a meagre resource and therefore, the wetlands and the sea are gradually being reclaimed more. The processes of globalization have condensed the quantum and quality of fish in the nearby waters of Mumbai.

'Development' projects, like the Bandra Worli Sea Link, have eaten into mangrove land. The builder-politician nexus has led to construction of commercial and posh residential complexes in Cuffe Parade, Lokhandwala, Bandra-Kurla and on such other lands. The extensive destruction of mangroves has augmented the sea-wave intensity, thereby causing sand erosion and the damage of fish breeding grounds. Huge mechanised trawlers comb the sea bed and drag to the surface everything that gets entrapped in their nets. The catch is then sorted out, wherein the required species and size of fish are set aside and the rest (often dead) are thrown back into the sea. In return this process ruins the fragile marine ecology, kills spawn and wastes potential marketable marine food. Also, unfavourably affecting the volume of fish stocks are the effluents released by industries, untreated sewage discharge and pollutants emanating from dumping grounds, which urbanization pushes outwards to the coasts. Oil leaks from the numerous rigs off the coast not only contaminate the water ecosystems but also deny them oxygen and thereby raise the toxicity level of the seas.

Globalisation has amplified carbon footprints leading to the greenhouse effect. Consequently, patterns of winds and oceanic currents have distorted. Under such circumstances, traditional or indigenous local knowledge becomes less accurate as a guide to safety of the smaller fishermen as they venture into the seas. Globalisation induced climate change is causing sea levels to rise, jeopardising the future of Koliwad (refers to a Koli settlement) as well as

the kolis themselves.

### **Livelihood Estrangement**

Given the ecological alienation of the Kolis the direct result as we have observed is the drop in the catch. Low production threatens livelihood. But this process of making the Kolis strangers to their own occupation and denying them their livelihood is supported by the policies and actions of the government and global trends. The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) was introduced by the Central Government of India in 1991 and worked fairly well to keep vested interests off the Indian coasts. However, the new Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) notification threatens the livelihood of the Kolis as it will give land on rent for buildings and fish culture as well as usurp sea space 22 kilometres deep from the coast. The Former Mumbai Mayor, Shubha Raul pleaded that Mumbai be given a special status under the CMZ to assist more large scale development projects (Down to Earth, 2008). This will further hurt the fishing community since infrastructure would be profusely constructed, destroying marine life and displacing Koliwadass. Policies that allow marine import reduce the market size for local marine products. Again, if MNC's are allowed to export fish from India, domestic exporters will suffer. The entry of non Kolis into the fishing sales sector deprives educated Kolis from accessing jobs related to their traditional occupational activities. State policies, which have banned foreign trawlers from operating within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), have ironically encouraged more Indian mechanized trawlers to fish within this zone. This

reduces the volume of the catch in waters closer to the coast, causing commercial damage to Kolis that fish here. Universalized subsidy programmes reduce the quantum of the subsidy and so decrease the intended benefits for the Kolis, while non Kolis flourish in marine trade. Even in the financial sector, the Kolis are discriminated against the RBI's (Reserve Bank of India) rule which maintains that cities should not have primary economic activities. Hence Kolis are not given access to organized credit (from commercial and cooperative banks) and so are indebted to the abusive money lenders and traders who charge them inflated interest rates. Even in the Koli community owned cooperatives, corruption is raging. This can be substantiated by interviewee, Shri Frankie Burken's comment: *'If you want your boat built first, you have to be the chairman of the society'*. This researcher was privy to a conversation among cooperative officials wherein they expressed their aversion at the ongoing greasing of palms to obtain diesel from government appointed suppliers. 'Fish wars' over space and products are commonplace incidents between non trawler owners opposing the big trawler owners. An interviewee informed this researcher *'We oppose the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) now World Trade Organisation (WTO) that promotes free fishing in our waters. 'Mother Ships' (a term used by the Kolis to describe a big trawler) come and exhaust the marine resources.'* Deep water fishing by industrial trawlers has dwindled near shore fish stocks. Again, hi-tech gadgets and fishing modes give the big trawlers an accuracy in tracking fish, along with ripping apart the fishing

nets of smaller fishermen (advertently or otherwise). It was also pointed out that the big trawler operations empty the fishing grounds to such an extent that fishing cannot be conducted there for nearly a month. This pushes Kolis deeper into the seas, increasing their operational costs, endangering their lives, without any assurance of a sizeable catch. The traditional techniques of fishing like the one wherein nets are inclined across anchored poles in the creeks (colloquially called dol net), have become commercially futile activities, expending time and exposing their fishing equipment to risks of being damaged. Big trawlers have the advantage of possessing all weather capacities to fish; this gives them a remarkable edge over the smaller fishermen. When their moving nets entangle with the stationary nets of the Kolis, much damage is caused to the nets of the Kolis and their catch is lost. But small fishermen lack resources to stay and put up a fight with the workers who are at the mercy of an absent owner. The various development projects in Mumbai have the worst effect on the livelihood of the Kolis because the city is expanding outwards and into the sea. The Special Economic Zones, Special Entertainment Zone and Tourism Zones that are planned by the government threaten to displace the Koliwadadas and the workspace of the Kolis. The Bandra Worli Sea Link has further restricted access to the sea and poses a new risk of boatmen being smashed into the pillars by strong currents. The proposed Rs. 350 crore statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj along with a tourist complex to be built off the Mumbai

coast will not only flout the law which bans further reclamation, but will also restrict boat movement of fishermen. ONGC's (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) 200-300 rigs and oil surveys along the coast of Maharashtra, many of them off the coast of Mumbai, had a five kilometre radius no access zone. After the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, this radius was increased to ten kilometres. The fishing grounds of the Kolis are reducing as the number of rigs is increasing to satisfy oil hungry domestic and international industries. As the fishing grounds contract, traditional fishermen drift into each other's territories, resulting in conflicts among Koliwadadas and disunity among the Kolis.

### **Social Marginalisation**

The alterations in the environment of the Kolis with respect to the ecology and their livelihood affect their culture, social relations and their identity is severed. The process of globalisation thus mechanically sustains a process of social marginalisation. Incorporation into urban cosmopolitan ways of life has caused cultural erosion making newer generations primarily shy away from fishing but only to be eventually strained back into it for economic survival.

The vested interests as well as the Brihan Mumbai Municipal Corporation are in the process of getting rid of dirt, slums and with it, Koliwadadas through the Slum Rehabilitation Scheme (SRA). The scheme, this researcher was told is not a Koliwada development option since it will take the Kolis away from the sea, put them in 225 square foot flats in buildings and deny them of a place to keep their nets, engines and their catch.

The land that Koliwadas and the fish drying areas occupy, belong to the government. The original inhabitants, according to the government's interpretation, live and work on land that was never theirs and therefore will have to accept the charity of the SRA. It should be noted that the CRZ is overlooked if the defaulter is an elite individual while the government becomes very law enduring when it comes to adjusting the SRA location nearer to the sea for the Kolis. In Mahul, the Kolis were displaced to make way for petroleum industries. The same happened when Girgaum Chowpatty (refers to a sand beach). Girgaum Chowpatty (considered a tourist attraction in Mumbai) was to be created and the Kolis were cast-off into cement chawls in Mumbai's interiors. (A chawl is a housing structure typical to Mumbai. It is of usually two or more floors. Each room opens out to a common balcony, and is occupied by a different family. There is a common bathroom and toilet on every floor.)

### **Holistic Development**

Post examination of the impact of globalisation on the traditional fishing community of Mumbai, this paper would now validate its socio-economic empiricism against an analytical frame based on Vandana Shiva's interpretation of the economies of natural resources (1999). According to her, natural resources can be divided into three economies. This paper maintains that if and only if these three economies are in sync with each other would holistic development fructify. Globalisation in its current format has essentially more hindrances than facilitations to such a

coordinated process.

1. For Shiva, the market economy consists of profit, capital, industrial production and they invariably lead to ecological destruction through intensive resource exploitation. This has been empirically verified through the interviews wherein this researcher was told about the extensive destruction of the marine sea bed through the combing operations of big trawlers for maximizing profits.

2. She also maintains that economy of natural ecological processes involves organic production and dependence on other ecological processes. Through the primary data and secondary information, this paper concludes that globalisation has enlarged the rate of pollution through effluents into the water systems that support marine life. Hence organic interdependence and ecological links are disrupted.

3. Finally, survival economy according to her, pertains to human society and the natural material basis for human survival and livelihoods. Globalisation, through profit-oriented mechanisms is overexploiting resources to meet market requirements. This study found that big trawlers empty out fish stock that cannot be replenished for nearly a month, thus denying fishermen of their basic livelihood during this period.

In the context of the Kolis, proper legislation against industrial trawlers, ensuring better water management, and promotion of locally appropriate technology that draws from the scientific knowledge of the Kolis will persuade sustainability. Their participation in the process of formulating policies that affect them will certify justice and prevent further economic and social

marginalization of these indigenous people. Vandana Shiva (1991) repeatedly points out that change in the social system, which gives importance to social profitability, and ecological sustainability is the only solution in the long run.

### **Movement of the Marginalised**

Ecological movements tend to use the idea of conservation that guarantees regeneration of the ecological economy but neglects the survival economy. A case in point would be the ban on harvesting sea cucumber (A kind of animal found on the marine floor) in the waters of the Lakshadweep islands cut off the livelihoods of the fisher folk who depended solely on the sea cucumber. Similarly, social movements tend to legitimise the abandoned exploitation of scarce natural resources by indigenous people because they have a traditional right. They are successful in establishing a survival economy but not an ecological economy. Consider the case of technologically equipping the fisher folk in order to increase harvest because they have a right will further diminish the already limited marine resources. In the struggle of the Kolis, the need to protect the ecology and at the same time to optimize it in order to protect livelihood is clear. With traditional knowledge and sustainable practices, the relationship between fishing and nature seems to be harmonizing.

The Fisher folk Movement can consequently be called a socio-ecological movement. The movement cannot however refuse the market forces that influence the people's lives that it represents. And besides, we have already concluded that holistic development is

the coming together of the three economies. Therefore, the movement of the fisher folk is fundamentally a socio-economic movement coexisting with the market economy. A positive impact of the globalisation process is the simplicity in which movements come together to form alliances.

The National Fish Worker's Forum (NFF) was born in 1978 to bring to the mainstream, the voices of the fisher folk of the nine coastal states of India. The meeting is a powerful tool to negotiate with the government and also to pass down correct and updated information to the ordinary fisher folk. The Kanyakumari March that culminated on May 1, 1989 is a representation of this intra fisher folk alliance. The NFF is part of the National Alliance for Peoples' Movements (NAPM). The fight of the fisher folk in India also becomes that of the Tribals, the Dalits, the Refugees and Women. At the international level Marx's call can be rephrased as "vulnerables of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains". Together, these global alliances conceptualise 'the Movement of the Marginalised'.

### **Conclusion**

Globalisation promotes a linear perspective of development and creates anarchy where it is impossible to identify individual offenders but the victims are identifiable. The fruits of globalisation have definitely not trickled down to the poor contrary to what the first world believes. In fact, it has ripped separately their lives further. Against the background of the Kolis, globalisation seeks to construct technological polarisation in order to dominate the

fishing sector. The actions of the vested interests only rob the Kolis of their livelihood and social life. Modern science and technology that is seen as 'neutral' and 'objective' thus justify policies and steps taken to 'develop' the city by burdening the Kolis with the costs of such development. The destruction of the natural and survival economy through over exploitation in the fishing industry has been made possible through the induction of technology. Modern scientific knowledge justifies modern technology by being reductionist and uneven. In fact, modern scientific disciplines are created to satisfy the needs of vested interests. Development gets equated with mere sectorised growth ignoring underdevelopment introduced in related sectors through difficult external economies of scale and these belittle the productivity of the ecosystem. Ultimately, it leads to a systemic collapse. Technology that globalisation promotes as being scientific, is not always in public interest. Policies based on this dominant partisan science will therefore also not be in public interest. For instance, big trawlers are not the answer to increasing productivity of the oceans. A more sustainable and just technology is needed to ensure that the 'global village' flaunting of globalisation does not end up being a global pillage. Hence, vulnerable groups like the Kolis have the right to develop themselves according to their interpretations of development rather than against the measure of development dictated by the first world. In the conflict between profits and survival, they are not looking to control the seas of the world but to have a right on the sea close to their

habitation in which they have fished for generations. Thus adopting the Weberian model of social action in social work practice may be a useful method in empowering the deprived Koli community.

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### **Corresponding Author**

Delfi Simon Chinnappan, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad - 500046. Telangana.  
Email: delfichinnappan@uohyd.ac.in

## **Dynamics of Urban Poverty in Mizoram: Lived Experiences of the Poor**

**GRACE LALHLUPUII SAILO**

*Department of Socialwork, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram*

*Most studies on urban poverty have used quantitative approach and have been made by economists, geographers and demographers while social workers have not studied poverty adequately. The present paper attempts to understand the dynamics of urban poverty in Mizoram from the lived experiences and perceptions of the poor people themselves. It also tries to understand the livelihood strategies adopted by the poor households in urban Mizoram. Livelihood strategies are explored in terms of the economic, social, as well as emotional aspects followed by the households to cope with vulnerability and poverty. In doing so, it attempts to probe into the physical, social and economic context of urban poverty and vulnerability in Mizoram. The study also attempts to suggest measures for policy making and social work intervention towards eradication of urban poverty. It employs qualitative methods to understand the dynamics of urban poverty. Case Study method is used to probe into the experiences of the urban poor from five localities in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram. The study shows that urban poverty is multi-dimensional and complex problem in that it has individualistic and structural bases. At the same time, case studies also illustrate that the urban poor are dynamic and active in managing their difficulties.*

### **Introduction**

India has undergone rapid urbanization over the past fifty years. From 1951 to 2001, India's urban population grew almost fivefold, from around 62 million in 1951 to around 286 million in 2001 (NFHS-3). According to the medium range projections of the United Nations, 41% of India's population will live in urban areas by 2030 (UN, 2005). India is at acceleration stage of the process of urbanisation. A number of urban agglomerations/ towns have grown from 1827 in 1901 to 5161 in 2001. The total population has also increased from Rs.23.84 crores in 1901 to Rs.102.7 crores in 2001 whereas the number of population residing in urban areas have increased from 2.58 crores in 1901 to 28.53 crore in 2001. Urbanisation in India is a part of the

global trend towards growing urbanisation. At present India is among the countries at the lowest level of urbanization. According to 2001 census, only about 28 % of the population lives in urban areas (Singh, 2002). Despite this trend, India has the second largest urban population in the world next to China (NFHS-3).

A World Bank study of urbanization patterns in 1990 indicates a definite trend of urbanization of poverty, the world over. Around half of the world's population is living in urban areas. By 2025, the size of the urban population is estimated to be double, adding 2 billion inhabitants to cities and towns. Poverty is urbanising but cities are centres of opportunities. It is estimated that between 1/4<sup>th</sup> and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of all urban households in the world live in absolute poverty. Urban slums house 30 to 60%

of city populations.

According to the 2011 Census, India has a population of 1,028.6 million with approximately 31.16 % or 377 million people living in urban areas. Among these, the NSSO survey reports that there are over 80 million poor people living in the cities and towns of India. The Slum population is also increasing and as per TCPO estimates, in 2001, over 61.80 million people were living in slums. It is interesting to note that the ratio of urban poverty in some of the larger states is higher than that of rural poverty leading to the phenomenon of 'Urbanization of Poverty'. The incidence of urban poverty estimated by the Planning Commission in 2007 shows that 49.6 million populations were living below poverty line. Rapid growth of urbanization, post globalization, has been associated with the emergence and growth of slum and squatter settlements. Around 28% of the Indian population lives in urban areas, of which 15% people reside in slums. Majority of these are poor and their sources of livelihoods depend on daily incomes from wage labour activities and petty trades in the unorganized sector. Livelihoods of urban poor are characterized by insecure employment; inappropriate skills as per market trend; insecure land and housing rights, poor living conditions, limited access to education, health and finance etc., which makes them highly vulnerable. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) and donor funded projects are now focusing on the livelihoods issues of urban poor.

The removal of urban poverty was recognized as a dominant objective in

the Indian Development Strategy since the Fifth Plan (1974-79). Since then, the Government of India has been continuously initiating various policies in this direction. The anti-poverty strategies, government policies and alleviation programmes have approached poverty eradication problems in different ways.

There is a widespread perception that poverty in India is concentrated in the rural areas. It is certainly true that the officially estimated urban poverty ratio (at 21 % on average for all of India according to the Planning Commission's poverty estimates for 2009-10) is considerably lower than the rural ratio of 34 %. It is also true that - given the still low rate of urbanisation in India - most of India's officially defined poor (nearly four-fifths) live in villages. However, there are grounds for questioning the policy focus on rural poverty, and important reasons for recognising that the nature and extent of urban poverty require urgent attention. This is not only because of the significant increase in absolute numbers of the urban population over the decade of the 2000s and the change in the classification of many settlements from rural to urban in the 2011 Census. It is also especially because urban poverty can take on a qualitatively different nature from its rural counterpart, and therefore may require very different policy interventions. In some States, urban poverty ratios are as high as or even higher than rural poverty ratios, such as in Kerala, Manipur, Punjab and Uttarakhand. In other States such as Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, the gap between urban and rural poverty ratios is quite small

(Chandrashekhara & Ghosh, 2013). In the context of Mizoram, 64,753 households are estimated to be living in Aizawl city, the capital of the State (Census, 2011). Out of this number, 16,426 households live Below the Poverty Line (GOM, 2010). In the year 2006, in the interest of public interest, the Government of Mizoram declared 73 areas as slum pockets within Aizawl city for implementation of different kinds of schemes to be operated under the Central Government as well as organizations like Asian development Bank which required identification and declaration of slum pockets for implementation of such schemes.

### **The Background**

Poverty in India has been the focus of many debates and policies for decades. Most of this focus has been on rural poverty, but urban poverty being as prevalent as it is today, seeks equal attention. Urban Poverty is a major challenge to development in India. Research on urban poverty in the country is relatively of recent origin in comparison to rural poverty. Dandekar and Rath made the first seminal study on urban poverty in 1971.

In the economic deterministic tradition, poverty has been defined in terms of income or consumption. Narrow as it may be, it is the most prevalent with economists leading and dominating the discourse on poverty and development, Thus the 'inability to attain a minimum standard of living' (World Bank, 1990: 27) in which the minimum standard of living based on a set of parameters defines the income poverty line and all persons whose income is less than that are categorised as poor.

Since independence, Indian policy-makers focused on rural development in response to Gandhi's call that "India lives in its villages". This focus was also justified by the fact that agriculture is subject to high risks from dependence on nature. As a result, urban poverty was sidelined because the urban poor were seen as people who had greater access to opportunities in dynamic urban systems and were therefore exposed to less serious uncertainties.

Most studies attempting to describe urban poverty have focused on drawing out the characteristics of urban poverty, often by comparing rural with urban poverty (Hashim, 2009; Supriti et. al. 2002; IFPRI, 2000; Satterthwaite, 1995; Baker, 1995; Wratten, 1995; Jain et. al. 1994; Mills and Pernia, 1994).

Several studies have also been attempted on the relationship between urban poverty and migration. (Singh, 2009; Kundu and Sarangi, 2007; Sundari, 2005; Walter, 2004; Singh, 2001; IFPRI, 2000; Wratten, 1995; Desai, 1987; Ginsberg, 1979) and that migration and urbanization contribute both at the household and community level (Yadav, 2004; Dutta, 2003; Atal, 2002).

The role of human capital in urban poverty has been the focus of some studies (Nanda, 2009; Mahavir, 2007; Bhasin, 2001; Putnam, 2000; IFPRI, 2000). The factors like vocational skills (see Unni 2009; GOI, 2000), and education (MART, 2009; GOI and UNDP, 2009; Cox and Pawar, 2006; Kumar and Aggarwal, 2003; NCU 1988) have been probed by some.

Only a few studies have focused on the vulnerability context of the urban poor (Schütte, 2005; Aggarwal, 2003). Some

have studied housing (Risbud, 2009; Rao, 2009; Cox and Pawar, 2006; Schütte, 2005) and land ownership (Mahadevia, 2009; Kebra, 1976) as important determinants of poverty in urban areas. Social support networks survival strategies of the urban poor have been studied by some scholars (Shutte, 2005; Wratten, 1995; Baker, 1995; Ginsberg, 1979). There are a number of other studies on the working of urban poverty eradication schemes in the context (GOI and UNDP, 2009; GOI, 2006; Sanjay and Kishan, 2006; Ramanathan et. al. 2002; Jain et. al. 1994).

A cursory look at the disciplinary affiliation of the scholars who have studied urban poverty could reveal the fact they are predominantly economists though sociologists, geographers and demographers are found among them. As most of the studies on poverty are predominantly quantitative in their methodological orientations, some advocate the use of a qualitative approach (Schütte, 2005) while some have advocated rights based and community based approach (Jacobsen, 2006). Increasingly, both at national and local urban level, the limits of single strand analysis and the importance of triangulation are acknowledged (de Haan et. al. 2000; Booth et. al. 1998; Moser et. al. 1996; Reddy, 1994; Paul, 1987). Some even advocate a combination of survey and participatory methods (Ellis, 2000: 200).

In the context of India, a number of research gaps could be identified in the literature on urban livelihood and poverty. Firstly, there is scanty literature on urban livelihood and poverty in the North East and even less in Mizoram.

The few studies that have been made focus on urbanization and the problems of population, planning and infrastructure of the State (Kumar, 1999; Kumar, 1998) while some other studies focus on migration and livelihood and not specifically on poverty (Hlawndo, Sailo and Kanagaraj 2014). There are a few studies on urban environmental problems in general (Batta, 2000) or specific problems such as air pollution (Lalengmawia, 2007) and domestic solid waste management (Lalhruaitluanga, 2006).

It may be said that such studies are made using objective indicators and the subjective realities of poverty have been overlooked. Most studies have used quantitative methodology while application of qualitative and participatory approaches is rare in this area. Lastly, most studies on poverty in India have been made by economists, geographers and demographers while social workers have not studied poverty specifically. It is imperative for social workers to conduct in depth interdisciplinary studies so as to effectively practice at multiple levels.

### **Rationale**

The present study attempts to understand the dynamics of urban poverty in Mizoram from the lived experiences and perceptions of the poor people themselves. Livelihood strategies are explored in terms of the economic, social, as well as emotional aspects followed by the households to cope with vulnerability and poverty.

This study hopes to provide benefit to policy makers, civil society organizations, social work practitioners, educators and researchers at a multi-

level. The policy makers at national and state level will be able to determine at the effectiveness of their policies in addressing urban poverty. In the light of the findings, they will be able to construct better policies and programmes to reduce risks faced by poor urban households and endorse sustainable livelihood. The Civil Society will be able to devise appropriate intervention strategies at various levels to combat urban poverty and the vulnerability of the poor. Social Work practitioners, educators and researchers will be able to use the results of the present study to arrive at a pragmatic understanding of urban poverty and thereby devise suitable intervention strategies in Mizoram and the North East. They will be able to advocate suitable policies for promoting sustainable livelihood to overcome urban poverty and its associated consequences.

### **Objectives**

The study aims to understand the social dynamics of urban poverty from the lived experiences of the urban poor. In doing so, it attempts to probe into the physical, social and economic context of urban poverty and vulnerability in Mizoram. It also tries to understand the livelihood strategies adopted by the poor households in urban Mizoram. The study also attempts to suggest measures for policy making and social work intervention towards eradication of urban poverty.

### **Methodology**

The present study employs qualitative methods to understand the dynamics of urban poverty. Case Study method is

used to probe into the experiences of the urban poor from five localities in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram.

### **Lived Experiences of the People**

Urban Poverty is multi-dimensional in that it has individualistic and structural bases. At the same time, the urban poor are dynamic in their coping with poverty as the following case studies illustrate.

#### **Case I: Experience of a single mother in the face of poverty**

Mrs. C, aged 77 years comes from a farming family in Mamit and currently resides in a locality that is low in development. As a child, she wanted to pursue nursing as a career but was made to help in family agricultural work. Women were not considered to study beyond the 3rd standard then. They cultivated rice and vegetables sufficient for the family and also sold sesame seeds and chillies for profit. Due to Governmental road development, they had to be rid of their house and so they rented a house but the compensation promised to them was never received. They ate meat once a year and were thrifty with their meager income. She eventually became a single mother with two kids and lived with her mother as her father had passed away early. She would work in the fields while her mother took care of the house and the children. Even the children were made to work every day after school. After passing matriculation, her children migrated to Aizawl for higher education. Her elder son laboured for daily wages and went to college at the same time. They earned and paid for their own education as she could send only Rs. 50/- per month. Her son now works in the

government service and they live in a pucca house of their own. According to her, self-reliance is the best, and one should not expect the Government to do things for us, and we have to work hard for our own blessings. They were poor because her father passed away early and they were ignorant as to claim compensation for their land. But migration, hard work and education have helped them escape poverty.

**Case II: Family cohesion as a coping mechanism**

Mrs. TK, aged 51 years, migrated from the village and currently resides in one of the localities that is low in development. She is the eldest of 6 siblings and gave up studying in Class I because her mother passed away early and her father was a daily wage labourer; and she had to look after the family. She got married in 1977 and migrated to Aizawl, and bore 6 children. Their house was so bad that they had to sleep with an umbrella when it rained at night. For two years, she and her husband went to the forest and prepared charcoal to sell in the market. They also had pigs which her in-laws took care of, along with babysitting the children. Later they made a tea stall, and took up whatever jobs were available and started petty business. Today, they have a small grocery stall within their locality. They are also able to provide for their children's education. According to her, poverty is inherited and is mainly due to illness and death in the family, low education and lack of skills. But due to family integration and hard work, they are resilient. For her family, migration has helped a lot as the urban center offers more opportunity to overcome

their situation.

**Case III: Experience of poverty in the urban fringe**

Mrs. LZ, 73 years migrated from Kharkhuplien, Manipur in 1983. Her family currently resides in the fringes of the city. Her family worked in their own farm in Manipur and sold hatkora and bananas for a living. Her husband passed away and the children were still young so their property had to be sold and they came to Aizawl in search of a livelihood. They reside in a thatched house that has been rented to them and even the renters do not own the land on which it is built. Their house rent and the house owners' rent of the land is based on understanding and it is unknown how long that understanding will hold fast. They receive rations under the PDS system but they have no BPL card as they are from Manipur. Mrs. LZ is old and no longer able to work. She had broken her hand while working and can only afford to apply oil to massage the painful area. They have no access to medical help or the financial resources to seek such help. Since they live in the peripherals of the city, the hospital is far away. Her distant cousin brother is also in Zemabawk and they constantly seek material and emotional help from him but he is also poor. She resides with her son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter; younger daughter and her son. Mrs. LZ's son is a daily wage labourer but drinks away the money on most days. They belong to EFCI church and they get foreign sponsorship from the US for the children. Their church provides free schooling for the two children as well as food and monthly stipend of Rs. 500/- per child. This is a

big help for them in meeting daily needs. She is of the opinion that her poverty is fatalistic and has been predetermined for her by God. After her husband's death there were occasions when they had nothing to eat and often prayed for food. It is better now that her children are grown up and are able to work as daily labourers.

#### **Case IV: Poverty and ill health**

Mr. LV, aged 60 years, migrated to Aizawl in 2000. He works under small contracts for a small scale industry but due to ill health, he rarely goes to work. His wife sells vegetables and rears two pigs for a living. When they had migrated to Aizawl in search of better livelihood, they had saved up and built their own house in Zemabawk North. They were healthy then and sold vegetables but now, they are unable to work as both of them have health complications such as recurring pneumonia and low blood pressure. They therefore sold their house and live as tenants in that same house on a monthly rent of Rs. 300/-. They have four children out of which three are married. The youngest is good in studies but cannot continue due to poverty and is presently working as a housemaid in the city for four years now, earning 3000/- a month. According to them, poverty is because of heredity and ill health. In their native village, they carried and sold wood for a living and were very poor. Their three older children had also dropped out from middle school because of their financial difficulties. However, Mr. LV is of the opinion that, had their parents migrated to the city, their condition would be much better now since their present

condition is also much better because they migrated. According to him, poverty can be overcome through receiving capital even to start petty business, ambitiousness and sincerity in one's own work and the sheer determination to overcome poverty itself. He feels that the society lacks a savings culture; and also many families do not have the nutritional knowledge to maintain good physical health amidst inflation. He felt that a few thousand rupees is nothing to start a business, lakhs are required as capital in order for a poor household to start a sustainable livelihood. Apart from this, poverty stems from the inability to maintain family in a thrifty manner.

#### **Case V: A migrant household manages poverty with livelihood diversification**

Mr. BT, aged 60 years migrated from Manipur in 2002 and currently lives with his family in the fringes of the city. He is the only son of a widow and after all his sisters were married off, he had to earn a living. He worked in a mission school and looked after his mother, his wife and 8 children but because of the unrest in Manipur they migrated to Mizoram. Their three sons had migrated first and had worked as motor workshop mechanics and the entire family came later on with hopes of better education and better life for the family. They rent a house at Rs. 300/- per month. Their sons and daughters are being schooled and the family grows vegetables which they sell in the market. They have now bought a small plot with an installment of Rs. 5000/- per month on which they have built a kutchra hut and currently use it as a small grocery shop. The profit is

meagre but it brings in some money since there are no such shops nearby. He also lends small amounts of money on interest to neighbours. He says this is helpful as he knows that poor people need money to start petty businesses or for their daily needs but have no access to commercial banks. They had to borrow for a major medical operation which set them back on their finances. Regarding Governmental assistance, they had received 1st and 2nd installment of a poverty alleviation scheme to start piggery but all their pigs had died.

According to him, the problem of poverty can be overcome when the Government starts to allocate resources and funds in a fair manner. At the same time, the Government alone cannot be blamed for poverty and underdevelopment of the people. The leaders and authorities at the locality/village level who are the main persons to identify and verify the deserving; to supervise and monitor schemes accordingly, are guilty of nepotism and corruption. Therefore development funds fall in the wrong hands and the poor remain poor. A good Local Council is needed for the success of development schemes. The Municipal Council development plans have overlooked the urban poor. The sense of Mizo community which has always been close knit and mutually helpful has disintegrated and only a political and party-based feeling is left. Perseverance and entrepreneurship skills among the youth are needed and a savings culture must be encouraged. People need to be patient in order to reap benefits from hard work, not to rely on the Government, to be thrifty and live simply within one's own means.

The family is the most important factor in everything and children must be disciplined and integrity must be built to cope through their hardships together.

#### **Case VI: Disability and Poverty**

Mr. VP, 39 years and his family are residents of a fringe locality in Aizawl. He has 6 children and was from a farming family in their native village. He had attended college in Aizawl and his family had hopes of his getting a good job and looking after the family, but due to an occupational hazard, he suffers from spinal cord injury and is paralyzed from below the waist. They sold their land and property in the village and came from their village to Aizawl in 2006 for better medical facilities and better educational opportunities for their children. They belong to AAY category and have a job card. They rear eight chicken and two pigs. His mother and sister, who had migrated along with them, live just next door. His wife is a seasonal worker and either sells fried foodstuffs or vegetables, NREGS work or whatever work is available. He receives an aid of Rs. 2000/- monthly from the Social Welfare Department. The Salvation Army League of Mercy gives them Rs. 1000/- per month. His eldest son of 18 years dropped out from school in order to earn a daily wage. The rest go to a Government school. The second son also earns small wages on weekends and during the holidays by which he pays for his own school uniform and school needs. His wife manages the children and the family's meagre earnings with thrift which is their main coping strategy.

**Case VII: Family together manages poverty**

Mr. MN, aged 62 years, lives with his family in the fringes of the city. He comes from a farming family and after many years, built a house of his own in Aizawl. He has three children, was a self-taught (through apprenticeship) carpenter (used to earn Rs.20 per day) but due to ill health, stays at home and can do only a few household chores. They have some land where they grow vegetables. They received financial assistance under NLUP and got the 1st installment of Rs.15000 to start a piggery. They live a simple lifestyle, cut down on expenses and their sons are given very little pocket money. When the children were younger, their mother used to sell fried foodstuff, vegetables and other things from house to house. But now due to his ill health, she goes to work in the fields instead of him. The eldest son gave up his studies so that his younger brothers can continue theirs. He grows vegetables in a distant field which his mother sells them in the market. Right from childhood, their sons were made to work even during weekends and school holidays. They have been taught to have dignity of labour. The middle one had gone to another district to work in the stone quarries while waiting for his under graduation results and now has a University degree. This case shows how proper family discipline and management can help overcome poverty.

**Case VIII: A female headed household escapes poverty**

Mrs. BK, aged 61 hails from a village and resides with her family in the peripherals of the city. She had studied

till class VIII but because of insurgency, their family migrated to Aizawl. Her father was a craft teacher in their village middle school. Katy Hughes, the British missionary teacher had stayed in their house for some time and the habits and values she imbibed in them have stayed with her till today. She taught them about nutrition and how to make the best of whatever fruits, grains and vegetables they had. She also taught them how to save money. Mrs. BK's husband passed away in 2007 and she had to take care of five children by herself. In 1994, they received NLUP grant and started out with six pigs with the 1st installment money. However, some pigs died and the few remaining had to be sold to treat her husband's cancer. She and her sons would wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning to buy meat at cheaper rates in order to prepare sachek, a local delicacy, to sell in the market; only after which the children went to their respective schools and colleges. The children had only 1 pair of slippers each which they wore to school as well as to church. They were taught not to be ashamed of their situation and to have dignity in their work. They were made to sell their produce before and after school. They bought land for Rs. 1000 and started a rice farm producing 3 tons of rice per year. Today, they have their own pucca house and all her children are graduates and employed in government services. She says sincerity in one's own work is the only solution along with hard work. Government schemes that come in the form of financial capital is a waste as it mostly results in dependency syndrome. Studies/research must be made for each region as there are topographical,

sociological and other differences in each region and so schemes must be made accordingly; a needs based approach is required. There is a need for proper markets and stability of prices especially food items. The mother is the most important because the rise and downfall of the family is in her hands. She needs to have good financial management skills, should be thrifty and discipline children and inculcate good values in them.

The case of Mrs. BK shows the implication of bridging capital wherein even weak ties have significant impact on coping strategies. It also highlights the importance of hard work and perseverance, household discipline, parenting skills, thrift and human capital in the form of education.

#### **Case IX: Financial safety for poverty reduction**

Mr. RD, 39 years hails from the village and is a daily wage labourer. He lives with his wife and two children of high school going age. After migrating to Aizawl, they find it very difficult to meet their daily needs. He works whenever he gets the opportunity and they buy betel nuts and leaves at a wholesale rate on credit which they clean and supply to the local shops. Their small earnings are spent for their daily needs and for their children's education. They have no means of savings and once some years back, they had invested 1 lakh in Chiahpuam, the recent financial scandal in Mizoram and had only got back Rs.40000 in installments. Their hopes had been shattered and all their life savings were wasted in this manner. His wife manages the household financial matters and they are frugal in their

spending. However, they have never made use of formal institutions like the Bank and whatever they have is kept at home. Their children take part in the community such as church and other activities and therefore have many requirements. Their children sleep on the floor as there is only one bed in the house. They have some debts in their locality shops as they tend to take daily needs on credit. Mr. RD suffers from health problems but does not go for any medical checkup as the children's education is more important for now. They have managed well with hard work but they are presently at their worst because of the money they lost in the scandalous investment plan. They also attribute their present financial condition to the fact that some three years back, they had separated and divided whatever little assets they have between the two of them which led to even more poverty. Now they are in the process of starting anew and looking forward to make their family thrive.

The case of Mr. BT's family illustrates how ignorance about financial investment and savings contribute to the vulnerability of poor households.

#### **Case X: Social Support as coping mechanism**

Mr. HT, 35 years hails from the village and migrated to Aizawl in 1998. His family undertook agricultural activities as a means of living but his parents passed away when they were still young and they had to fend for themselves. He is now the main bread earner of the family and survives on the income he receives from daily wage labour. He is married with two children and his unmarried sister resides with them. Mr.

HT suffers from ill health and a huge amount of money has been spent for his medical expenses. They have frugal meals and try not to have any debts or take credit from shops but they have no savings either. Their house has been built for them by their community members as an act of charity. Mr. HT is very active in the community especially the YMA and therefore they get a lot of help from the community. He manages all financial matters of the house and they are thrifty in their expenses. They have received capital under the NLUP scheme with which they have bought a pig and a television. They feel that they are poor because of their parents' early death and that it is in their fate to be poor so they have accepted their situation. The high cost of commodities and inflation is their main problem and they hope that the Government will take more initiatives in eradicating poverty.

### **Conclusion**

Urban poverty is becoming a problem at large due to rapid urbanisation in Mizoram. The study has probed into the dynamic aspects of urban poverty in terms of perception of manifestations, causes and strategies adopted by the households. Urban Poverty in Mizoram is structural in that it has roots in demographic and economic inequalities such as family form and size, location, gender and educational status. The study revealed the lack of entrepreneurship among both poor and non-poor respondents. Another important revelation is the deficiency of savings culture among the Mizos as well as financial management skills. However, the poor are dynamic and active in coping with their situations. The lived

experiences of the urban poor exposed how illness and disability adversely affects households and their livelihoods. Proper household financial management and livelihood diversification can help overcome poverty. The resiliency of the households and of the wider livelihood systems have helped them to adapt to existing urban conditions. The study reveals the immense range of feminization of poverty, not only in terms of female headed households and its vulnerabilities but rather the huge role bequeathed to women in managing a household amidst vast limitations. Social Capital in the form of social supports was found to be an effective coping mechanism. The case studies show how several female headed households as well as those headed by men and women coped better when the mother or wife had skills in household financial management. It is also evident that families which disciplined their children were more cohesive and active in meeting livelihood goals. Strengthening of human capital especially with regard to education and capacity building for women can be seen as effective measures to be taken in this regard.

The State holds responsibility in the promotion and creation of livelihood opportunities for those lesser educated and less skilled. However, it is felt urban poverty alleviation schemes are not properly monitored and often politicalised whereby many deserving beneficiaries are excluded from such benefits. Civil Society Organizations need to play a more proactive role in capacitating poorer households to make sustainable livelihood choices and overcome poverty. Many of the poor

households have neither adequate knowledge nor skills to utilize government programmes. Though the Central and State Government have a huge task in bringing about socio-economic development by alleviating poverty, there is a tendency among beneficiaries and society in general to rely entirely on Government efforts. This dependency syndrome leads to the degradation of moral values thereby leading to illegal practices and more disparities in society.

The urban population face deprivation in terms of lack of access to sanitary living conditions and their well-being is hampered by discrimination, social exclusion, crime and violence, insecurity of tenure, hazardous environmental conditions and lack of voice in governance. Low levels of education and lack of skills have resulted in the inability to access the already limited employment opportunities. This accentuates the criticality of skills up-gradation for better livelihoods opportunities in urban areas.

The Case studies thus illustrate the multi-dimensionality of urban poverty and how households cope with illness, disability and death. Some have even overcome the vicious cycle through sheer hard work and determination while many households still struggle to manage their day-to-day existence amidst the high cost of living in urban Mizoram. The emerging and significant coping mechanisms found were migration, family discipline and thrift, bridging capitals, livelihood diversification and social support. The interviews disclose the strong role played by women in managing household finances, raising children to be thrifty and determined

hard work to meet daily needs.

Social workers in different settings of practice need to concentrate on the poor households in the slum designated areas. Among them, priority attention needs to be given to female-headed households and households headed by the aged. To avail the benefits of social security schemes meant for aged, widows etc., social workers can work as agents of information dissemination. Social workers can extend all sorts support to the poor households to have access to development administration and avail the benefits of appropriate development schemes. They need to network with the government development agencies, health and education as well the local community based organisations. Social Workers can be advocates of the above suggested policy measures.

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#### **Corresponding Author**

Grace Lalhlupuii Sailo, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Mizoram University, Aizawl - 796004. Mizoram.

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

## **Social Welfare, Development and Empowerment: Fields, Perspectives and Paradigms in Social Work Research in Mizoram**

**KALPANA SARATHY**

*Department of Socialwork, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram*

**EASWARAN KANAGARAJ**

*Department of Socialwork, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram*

**CHINNATHAMBI DEVENDIRAN**

*Department of Socialwork, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram*

*The present paper attempts a critical review of research conducted in various fields of social work by the department of social work, Mizoram University, over a period of five years (2004-2008). Social work research is an applied branch of methodology of social scientific research which is supposed to enhance the scope and effectiveness of social work practice in varied fields. This paper is aimed towards presenting a review of substantive, theoretical and methodological aspects of social work research conducted in Mizoram in the fields of welfare of the family, child, women, youth and the elderly; health and mental health; as well as rural, urban and tribal community development. From the overview of the studies conducted in the varied fields of Social Work in Mizoram, coexistence of the paradigms of social welfare, development and empowerment was observed. Methodologically speaking, the studies in all the fields of Social Work practice were predominantly quantitative in their orientation. Yet, mixed designs were used whereby qualitative methods as well as participatory methods were incorporated along with field survey in many of the studies.*

### **I**ntroduction

The present paper attempts a critical review of research conducted in various fields of social work by the department of social work, Mizoram University, over a period of five years (2004-2008). It presents a review of the theoretical, conceptual and methodological aspects of the research work done, their patterns and trends.

Social Work is a professional service based upon scientific knowledge and skill in human relations, which assists individuals alone or in groups, to obtain social and personal satisfaction and

independence. It is usually performed by a social agency or related organization (Friedlander, 1955). Historically, the goal of professional social work has been to enhance human well-being. It operates within the three paradigms of welfare, development and empowerment to achieve its ultimate goal of human welfare. The welfare paradigm emphasizes external support to the individuals to cope with their problems; while in the development paradigm self-reliance is emphasized. On the other hand, in the empowerment paradigm the peoples' involvement in determining the decisions that affect their lives are

emphasized.

The paper is presented in six sections. The context of the social work education and research is described in the first section. The second section is devoted to review the studies in the field of welfare of family, child, youth and elderly. The studies on health and mental health are reviewed in the third section. In the fourth section a review of the studies on women is attempted. The fifth section presents an overview of the research on tribal community development. In the concluding section the challenges and directions for future research are presented.

### **Research in Social Work**

Social Work Research is often considered as one of the minor methods of social work practice (Friedlander, 1955). By considering only the scope of the research or the substantive issues concerned, social work research cannot be treated as one of the methods of social work profession. Though social work research shares the methodological orientations of social scientific research, it has no unique method or technique of research of its own. As Ramachandran and Nayak (1968) rightly observed, social work research is not as such a method of social work, but an applied branch of methodology of social scientific research. Social work research is the use of scientific methods in the search for knowledge, including knowledge of alternate practice and intervention techniques which would be of direct use to the social work profession and thus enhance the practice of social work method. It can be considered as a species of social scientific research (Ramachandran and

Nayak, 1968).

Research is a vehicle of development and advancement of any scientific discipline. Social work as applied social science and human service profession is no exception. Social work research reviews the existing laws, theories, concepts, methods and techniques for their relevance, adequacy and sufficiency from time to time. It widens the profession's horizons, refines its approaches, strategies, methods and techniques and aids to cope with the changing needs of society.

### **Social Work Education and Research Training in Mizoram**

The department of social work was established in 1992 at the Aizawl campus of the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). However, it is the formation of a full-fledged Central University at Aizawl that saw the department being operationalised. The department began offering post-graduate courses from 2002. Within 4 years, the first doctoral scholars were registered in 2006. Thereafter M. Phil. courses have begun in 2008. The department offers MSW, M.Phil and Ph.D. As research skills are necessary for practice of social work in different settings, training students in the application of quantitative, qualitative and participatory methods begin at postgraduate level. A separate course on social work research is a part of the MSW course. The course introduces the scientific method, its components, as well as methods of data collection, processing and analysis. It also provides an exposure to statistical testing. As a part of the curriculum, students undergo a ten days rural camp, wherein they

practice research methods in profiling the village community and assessing the community needs. Before the commencement of rural camp a one-day workshop on field survey and participatory rural appraisal is conducted for the students. These MSW students use their research methods in field work in the community settings in the third and fourth semesters. During the period 2002 -2007, the MSW curriculum has a dissertation component in the fourth semester. To integrate research and social work practice, research projects have been integrated with fieldwork in the fourth semester. In the M.Phil programme, advanced training in the philosophical foundations of social work is provided. The students are taught the applications of qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods. Practical exposure is sought to be provided via field practicum.

Despite having only a strength of 2-3 faculty members for over five years, the department has been able to produce over 80-dissertation/project work, which are essentially empirical studies on a range of social work concerns. Against this backdrop, the present paper restricts its scope to the studies conducted by MSW students. These studies have been on samples ranging between 30-120 persons. The next section presents a review of studies on welfare of family, children, youth and the elderly.

### **Family Life Cycle: Children, Youth and Elderly**

Family is one of the basic institutions of our society. It plays a significant role in upbringing children as well as moulding the personality of an individual. Family members carry out

their functions and roles in the context of the family life cycle. The family life cycle is an ever-changing process which encapsulates marriage, procreation and raising of children, the departure of children from the household, retirement and death. At present, families are facing lots of challenges due to poverty, illiteracy, alcoholism and other related issues in Mizoram.

In view of these challenges, in the department some of the familial issues were studied in the context of Mizoram. The key challenges studied were marital breakdown (Fabawl, 2004), single parenthood (Lalhlimpui, 2006), and Mizo customary law (Lalmuanpuii, 2006). Fabawl (2004) assessed the impact of marital breakdown on family strength. Lalhlimpui (2006) attempted to identify the major challenges to single parent families in Aizawl while Lalmuanpuii (2006) assessed the perceptions on the challenges of Mizo Customary Law to women in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance.

Children are the backbone and future of every nation. In India alone, children constitute about 40 percent of the total population. They are invaluable assets of any society and have a significant role to play in the development of our country. The future of any country depends on the holistic development of the children. They are facing numerous challenges such as child labour, child abuse, child marriage, children in conflict with the law, child prostitution, child beggary, and child trafficking. They are also deprived of proper food, clothing, shelter, parental care and education. They are in need of care and protection from the challenges and provision of love and protection and

meeting of emotional needs. The empirical studies were concerned with specific group of children in need of care and protection in the context of Mizoram.

There were studies on children of poor families (Lalramngheta, 2007), child labour (Lalhriatpuii, 2006), child abuse (Zorinpuii, 2007), children in conflict, (Lalrinchanna, 2006), girl children (Laltanpuii, 2006), adolescence, (Lalbiaksangi, 2007), and school children (Buli, 2004). These studies attempted a situational analysis of these specific groups of children and identified the major challenges faced by them from a social work perspective. All these studies presented demographic profile, socio-economic and psychosocial factors, the magnitude of the issues and challenges faced by the children in need of care and protection and children in conflict with the law. In addition, these studies suggested how social work methods and techniques can contribute in the governmental and nongovernmental settings to protect and promote the children.

Youth are an important section of our country as one third of our population comprises of youth. They are representing the nation's strength in terms of human resources. It is very important to take care and guide our young generation. If they are guided properly, they can become a great asset for our country. At present, they are facing lots of challenges due to poverty, unemployment, corruption, ethnic conflict. These problems ultimately collapse the personality of youth and they indulge in smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction, and face threat of HIV/AIDS infection, especially in the

northeast context.

Generally, the challenges of youth are related to the youth culture and lifestyle. In fact the studies in the department focused on culture and lifestyle of the youth. The study by Darrothanga (2007) on youth culture among college students focused on the beliefs and values as well as recreational patterns. As regards the lifestyle, a couple of studies were attempted in Mizoram. Mass media exposure (Lalniehkima, 2005), and recreational patterns (Hmingthanawii, 2006) of the Mizo youth was studied by some. One of the challenges of youth embedded in their life style in Mizoram is premarital sex. There was one study on premarital sex and quality of life (Lalringhetti, 2004). A closely related issue is HIV/AIDS. Youth awareness on HIV/AIDS among the youth was explored in one study (Lalhluipua, 2005).

These studies provide an insight into the youth culture in northeast India (Devendiran, 2008). They also give a picture of the challenges faced by youth due to the consumerist culture, and mass media exposure and how they are shaping the attitude of the youth. Moreover, these studies highlighted the quality of life and the lifestyle of youth in northeast India. The youth studies demonstrate the scope of working with young people for their development.

The most important life cycle of family is old age, which is an inevitable process of any human being. There are a few studies related to elderly persons. One is in the rural context which assessed the quality of life of rural elderly in Mizoram (Lalmuanpuii, 2004); and another study focused on the needs and problems of the urban elderly

(Lalrohluua, 2007).

Social work research in the fields of family, child, youth and the elderly focus mainly on the quality of life and needs and problems of specific groups. These studies used functional-structural and systems theory predominantly. It also emphasized the need for practicing social work in Mizoram and underlined the scope for application of the generalist social work approach as well as strengths and empowering perspectives at micro and macro levels. These studies were oriented towards social policy and social work practice in governmental and non-governmental contexts. These studies by and large were based on field survey while in some instances, case studies were also incorporated.

### **Health, Mental Health and Disability**

Social work in healthcare was one of the first fields of professional practice to be established and remains one of the largest sectors of the profession in most of the developed countries (Dworkin, 1997; Hopps and Collins, 1995). In India, the specialized area of work in health has been offered since the 1930's. In Mizoram, this specialized area of work in health was offered to one batch of social work students.

The research work by way of dissertations in partial fulfillment of Post Graduate degree in the area of health has been predominantly in the area of reproductive and child health (RCH). In addition to this, they have been on issues related to HIV/AIDS as well as lifestyle illnesses such as diabetes (Hnamte, 2005) and cancer (Lalhlupuii, 2005). Spousal loss due to cancer and the attendant psychosocial challenges have

been explored in one study (Lalhlupuii, 2005); and this study employs the bio-psycho-social nature of exploration. Mental health concerns reflected in dissertations by students include studies related to stress as well as suicide and the psychosocial factors associated with its aetiology (Hauhnar, 2005). In both the studies, emphasis has been on social support and its perceived availability to persons with various health problems. Stress among student population, perceived stressors as well as social support and coping mechanisms by students in handling stress have been studied (Nag, 2005). The only study to be conducted in the area of disability has emphasized a family systems approach and explores the family environment and social support available to persons who are physically challenged (Lalrempuii, 2004).

Reproductive health issues concerning women's health are an important area of intervention for health social workers. Women's personal and social identities are more likely to be defined in terms of their biological capacity to conceive and carry a pregnancy and women are more likely than men to be held responsible for a couple's failure to conceive a child (Blyth, 2008).

In the department of social work, the studies in this area employ and reflect a Life Span approach. Further, these studies are located within the psychosocial and /or ecosystems theoretical paradigm of understanding. The studies on reproductive health in our department have therefore concentrated on meaning, perception and understanding by women to events within their reproductive life cycles. The significance of life events such as

menopause, often perceived as a negative event (and cessation of sexual functioning and an alteration in the meaning attributed to femininity) in a tribal society in the northeast is therefore important in many ways. Perceived effect of menopause on appearance, self-confidence, social support as well as on sexual functioning explain how sexuality and reproduction in particular have assumed importance in the narratives of women (Lalparmawii, 2005). Similarly, the meanings attributed to menstruation, the perceptions of adolescent girls on the problems associated with it as well as their need for social support have been explored (Zonunpari 2005). Such studies are located within gender and health and they follow a trajectory of women's events and understand the reproductive issues within a larger and broader societal structure and context. Notions, perceptions and reflections assume the proportions of a deconstruction and reconstruction in a society where there are few systematic explorations of this nature.

In a similar vein and interestingly the use of birth control measures by Mizo women has also been studied and results indicate that a vast majority of the respondents are using such measures. The significance of such studies highlight the need to explore women's reproductive choices and exercise of control over their own bodies.

Crosscutting issues related to health, sexuality and sexual functioning have been explored in several other studies. The studies in the area of sexual and reproductive health reflect the major concerns in the state such as HIV/AIDS. Studies in this area of concern of sexual

health dealt with common health problems of sex workers (Vanlalzari, 2005) as well as on drug abuse and HIV/AIDS (Laltanpuui, 2004) as also on perceptions related to HIV/ AIDS among the youth (Lalhlupuiia, 2005).

Almost all the studies related to reproductive health have indicated the need for more services and programmes for women. The need for pre-marital counseling, workshops, gender sensitive education, and counseling have been suggested. Family Life education is seen as a major suggestion that has emanated from the studies in this area. These studies therefore can be seen as contributing concretely in providing service directions for social workers. Further, almost all the studies in this area of health offer suggestions based on integrated social work approach and employ the generalist perspective in this regard. Scope for further research in this area of RCH include studies on infertility, sex selection, child bearing and rearing. One study in the department has however explored the child rearing practices of Mizo women (Elizabeth, 2004).

The studies conducted thus far on RCH have been developmental in orientation but are yet to assume an orientation to empowerment. Studies focusing on societal structure and the location of reproductive issues within this structure and the dynamics thereof are yet to be explored. Studies conducted elsewhere have for example explored the role of social work in challenging reproductive health disadvantage and inequality, locally, nationally and internationally, highlighting both constraints and suggestions for developing interventions (Blyth, 2008).

Three studies have focused on alcohol and its use in Mizo society. One has studied alcohol as a community problem (Lalnuntluangi, 2004) and has basically used a psychosocial approach while the others have focused on different target groups such as women (Lalmuanpuii 2008) and children (Lalengmawii 2008) in a community that is infamous in Mizoram for illicit trade and consumption of alcohol (rice beer). Both the studies have tried assessing the psychosocial needs and challenges of the target group concerned.

#### **Security, Livelihood and Empowerment of Women**

The issues concerning women have been explored using different paradigms and approaches. There have been but a few studies that have focused on women's issues. Some lie within the realm of women's health and security. A bio-psycho-social approach has been used to understand the very sensitive nature of domestic violence perpetrated against women.

The ability of social workers to detect and address domestic violence is critical given the prevalence and consequences of violence, the reluctance of women to identify abuse as a primary problem, and the multiple service needs of battered women and their children (Danis, 2003). Most social workers were not trained to deal with, or sensitive to the problem of domestic abuse (Kanuha, 1998), and despite social workers' extensive involvement in child and family services, mental health, and child welfare, the profession as a whole has been mostly silent about the problem. Battered women themselves have not had much good to say about their interactions with

social workers. They have reported that professionals often put them in a double bind by blaming them for either not wanting to stay and solve problems in their marriages or remaining in their abusive marriages without having personal or community resources to help them leave (Flynn, 1977).

In the department, one study has explored the issue of domestic violence and has predominantly employed qualitative means to collect and analyse data. The study has explored the mental health of women who are subjected to violence within their homes (Lalchhantluanga, 2006). In the context of Mizoram, this study has revealed that alcohol consumption by men and subsequent violence are major problems and the former is seen as being responsible for the latter. Emphasis in this study has been on the challenges faced by battered women. Social Work research has to lead towards practice and interventions. This study has highlighted that there are no transitional homes and facilities that are present for women as tertiary care facilities. In the absence of these facilities and following violence, women are compelled to compromise on residential circumstances in the homes of relatives, thereby compromising on the dignity of their existence. The study in question has certainly been cognizant of feminist research while its own location is still within the psychosocial one. The need to understand, analyse and criticize social structures that help perpetrate violence is a future direction of study and exploration for studies that are to understand violence.

Three studies have focused on livelihoods of women. One has had to

do with the sale of second-hand clothes by women in Aizawl (Liansangpuii, 2005). The second one deals with domestic workers (Ruth, 2007) while a third explores responses of women as heads in single-parent families (Lalhlimpuii, 2006). The studies highlight the role of women as income earners who eke their livelihoods placing themselves thus in double or multiple burdensome positions. They are exposed to risks and uncertainty both within and outside the home. The studies are placed within a paradigm that are welfarist and are psychosocial in their orientation.

There are a few studies focused on empowerment of women. This study explores the bearing of women's education, employment and social and political participation on women empowerment. This study attempted to conceptualize empowerment as women's involvement in household decision making in personal, domestic, social, economic and political domains (Zate, 2005). This study also attempted to identify the major constraints of women development and empowerment and downplayed the role of Mizo patriarchy in disempowering women. Another study on perceptions related to women's empowerment (Hmingthanpari 2007) basically documents how women and men in Mizoram view empowerment.

### **Community Development in Tribal Context**

Community development is one of the fields of social work in India. Community development in this context aims at promoting socio economic development of the people by mobilizing and organizing them in the rural and urban community contexts. Here, a

typical social worker is engaged in grappling with four interrelated dimensions of the process of community development. They are the challenges; agencies service users (clientele) and strategies. The studies conducted in the department of social work addresses all these dimensions except the service users within a social development paradigm. Mizoram is predominantly a tribal state and undergoing the process of rapid urbanization. The Mizo rural and urban communities have been riddled with a number of problems in spite of their formalized social structure. Community development primarily is concerned with addressing these issues or challenges. Hence, a number of studies have been conducted. The studies mainly focused on three interrelated areas, viz., the challenges, institutions and strategies of community development.

Social work intervention requires a comprehensive, systematic and scientific understanding of the problems, issues or needs of rural and urban communities. In fact, the primary task of social workers is to identify these challenges and probe deeper into it. In Mizoram, in both rural and urban contexts, poverty and livelihood constitute the major challenge to community development and social work. The studies by Laltlanmawi (2004) and Malsawmdawngliani (2007) probed into the socio economic structural bases and dynamics of rural and urban poverty respectively. Both these studies traced the socio economic structural bases and bearing of livelihood on poverty. They also assessed the manifestations and causes of poverty from the poor and non-poor households. Further, they attempted to

understand the dynamics of poverty with the help of case studies from the lived experiences of the poor. One more aspect of poverty, which was probed in the urban study, was the role of state and civil society institutions in addressing the same.

The social work researchers not only probed into poverty but also other livelihood issues in both urban and rural communities. Zaitinvawra (2004) explored the patterns of transformation in rural livelihood in the wake of the switch over from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture in the rural context. Lalrinhlua (2006) studied agricultural marketing which is an issue closely related to agricultural livelihood in rural Mizoram. Zaitinvawra (2004) tried to assess the variations in the patterns of livelihood of shifting cultivators and semi settled agriculturists. He also probed into the willingness of the cultivators to permanent agriculture and the problems involved as well as their perceptions them. Lalrinhlua (2006) assessed the cultivators' access to agricultural marketing information infrastructure, and probed into the alternative channels and problems therein. In the urban context, Lalpekmawia (2006) studied the push and pull factors in migration of rural households to urban areas of Aizawl and the impact of the same on the livelihood and living conditions of the migrants. He also attempted to identify the major problems that daunt the migrants in the capital city of Mizoram.

There are some who studied peculiar problems of urbanization in Mizoram. The challenges to urban environment such as air pollution and solid waste management were probed by some

studies. Lalhruaitluanga (2006) assessed the pattern of domestic solid waste, its storage and disposal, and satisfaction over solid waste management in Aizawl. He also identified the major problems in the urban solid waste management in the popular perception. On the other hand, Lalengzuala (2007) attempted to understand the peoples' perceptions on air pollution as a social problem in Aizawl. He also tried to identify causes of air pollution, and assess the morbidity due to air pollution in the city. In the urban context, alcoholism as a community problem was explored by Lalnuntluangi (2004).

Today, inadequate supply of drinking water constitutes a major problem in both rural and urban communities in Mizoram. Lalrosangi (2005) attempted to study household drinking water management in a village community. She explored into the sources, distance traveled for collection, pattern of storage, use, and perceived adequacy of water.

The second dimension of the research are the agencies or institutions. State and civil society actors play a vital role in addressing the challenges and achieving the goals of improving the quality of life and social justice in rural and urban community contexts. The studies focus on the effectiveness of government programmes and various components of civil society in both contexts. Only one study has probed into the effectiveness of rural housing schemes (see Zothanpuii 2005). Some studies have probed into the role of local self-governing institutions in the rural development. Gangte (2007) explored the role of Kuki traditional institution

of chieftainship in tribal development in Manipur while Lalremtlunga (2007) assessed performance of village council in Mizoram. Role of voluntary organisations (Abraham, 2004) and self-help groups (Lalrinliana, 2004) in rural development have also been assessed. In the urban context, a few studies focus on the role of the major community organisations in community development (Hmar, 2008). There was a comparative study of leadership and community power structure and their role in community development also (Zonunkima, 2006).

The third dimension of the social work research in community development is that of strategies. There are various strategies followed at the community level to further the goals of social policy and social work by the state and civil society institutions. The studies have attempted to assess the status and relevance of the strategies of urban interaction (Lalthanzuali, 2005) and social mobilization (Kanagaraj and Ralte: 2007) in the rural context. In the urban context, the strategies followed by the state and civil society actors such as social development (Sailo, 2007), social action (Chawngthu, 2007), networking and collaboration (Lalhangaizuala, 2007), and poverty alleviation were assessed by their studies for their effectiveness in addressing the challenges of community development in Mizoram. Interestingly, one study attempted to assess the relationship between social capital, local governance and community development in both the rural and urban contexts (Lalramhluna, 2007).

Social work research on community development in both rural and urban

contexts adheres to social development paradigm while considering the challenges, and strategies. The livelihood challenges of the community especially poverty have gained the attention of the researchers. The focus of the studies on social mobilization, networking and collaboration, social development as well as social capital do demonstrate the developmental thrust of social work research in Mizoram. Considering the theoretical perspectives used in these studies, they are by and large interdisciplinary in nature. To be specific, these studies apply sociological, economic and political perspectives such as social capital, power structure, social mobilization to study the macro level factors and their bearing on development. The structural bases and dynamics were the two dimensions of probe in most of the studies and hence these studies provide systematic information on the structure of rural and urban communities and the dynamics of their working as well as problems. In fact, in all of these applied social science studies, there were a number of suggestions offered for macro level interventions by state civil society institutions and social work.

Methodologically, the question is whether the studies are quantitative or qualitative in nature. In fact, most of these studies were quantitative in their orientation. They use scales for measuring concepts and parametric and non-parametric statistics for assessing the relationship between them. They have attempted to study one or two communities and stratified random sampling procedure has been used. By and large they relied on field survey with structured interview schedule for data

collection. Simple statistical measures such as ratios, averages and percentages were used. Cross tabulation and bivariate statistics such as correlation were used to draw inferences. They have not used any multivariate techniques for analysis.

Yet, the tendency is to use qualitative information in terms of case studies so as to understand the dynamics of community development in rural and urban contexts. For instance, the studies on the challenge of poverty in rural (Laltlantlanmawi, 2004) and urban contexts (Malsawmdawngliani, 2007) used case studies to describe the process of impoverishment. To discuss the role of state and civil society actors in implementation of housing schemes (Zothanpuii, 2005) and the role of community leadership in community development (Zonunkima, 2006) case studies were used. In the studies on strategies of urban poverty alleviation (Dawnkimi, 2008), networking and collaboration, (Lalmangaihza, 2006) case studies were explored to understand their working. One more emerging trend is use of participatory methods. In the more recent studies on poverty (Malsawmdawngliani 2007; Dawnkimi 2008), and community organisations, relational methods of participatory learning and action have been used along with quantitative and qualitative methods.

Conceptualization and operationalisation are the key aspects of research, which need our attention as sophistication in it could also contribute to advancement of social science. Though these studies were focusing on the macro level reality and addressing the issues concerned with the institutional aspects of human social

problems, they have used cognitive behavioural approach for conceptualization and measurement of constructs. In a few studies social network conceptualization are also applied. Interestingly, most of the concepts were operationalised in terms of their multiple dimensions. Behavioural constructs such as member participation in SHG (Lalrinliana 2004) use of tools and techniques (Zaitinvawra, 2005), water use (Lalrosangi, 2005), etc. were operationalised in terms of four point scales. Cognitive constructs such as perception and satisfaction were used in a number of studies. For instance, cognitive constructs such as perceived standard of living, perceived manifestations, perceived causes of poverty (Laltlanmawi, 2005; Malsawmdawngliani, 2007), satisfaction over housing schemes (Zothanpuii, 2005), perceived impact of SHGs (Kanagaraj and Ralte 2009) etc., were measured in terms of four point scales with a number of items. Interestingly, in conceptualization and operationalisation of social capital, both the cognitive and behavioural aspects were combined. In conceptualizing community power structure (Zonunkima 2006), interorganisational collaboration in social welfare (Ralte and Kanagaraj 2007), as well as interaction pattern of SHGs with other organisations (Kanagaraj and Ralte) social network concepts and diagrammatic representations were used.

It is noteworthy that the social work curriculum (MSW) has influenced the choice of research topics and these research works are often used as reference material in classroom teaching as well as providing supervisory input

to field work practice. The study of community power structure (Zonunkima, 2006) is while teaching the course on community practice. The studies on rural and urban poverty by Laltnmawi (2005), Malsawmdawnglini (2007), and Dawnkimi (2008) are used as reference material in teaching the courses on rural and urban development (MSW 304) as well as tribal development (MSW 404). The study on shifting cultivation (Zaitinvawra and Kanagaraj) is used teaching students on tribal problems (MSW 404).

### **Concluding Observations**

Professional social work ultimately aims at enhancing human well-being at multiple levels. Social work research aims at enhancing the appropriateness and effectiveness of social work intervention with individuals, families, groups, communities, organisations, etc. The coexistence of the paradigms of social welfare, development and empowerment could be observed. Among them the predominance of developmental paradigm could be observed in the fields of youth, women, health and community development while the welfare paradigm dominates the research on family and children. Empowerment gains currency in the fields of women, youth, and community development. In the tribal context of Mizoram, social work research was conducted in the fields of family, child, youth and elderly, women, health and community development. The challenges to social practice were focused in all these fields while target groups were focused in the field of child welfare. The role of institutions and strategies were focused only in the field of community

development.

Methodologically speaking the studies in all the fields of social work practice were quantitative in their orientation. Yet, mixed designs were used whereby qualitative methods as well as participatory methods were incorporated along with field survey in many studies in different fields especially women, health and mental health and community development. There is thus a move towards a multimodal approach rather than methodological pluralism or shift from quantitative to qualitative paradigm.

All the above discussions thus prove that in a short period of five years, social work research in Mizoram had generated literature for teaching the courses on the methods and fields of social work. In this endeavor they have addressed the core issues of social work practice. Further, they have generated national publications too. It is noteworthy to mention here that during this five-year period the department was functioning in the city and did not have access to UGC inflibnet and high quality international research journals at all.

The major limitation of Social Work research in Mizoram is that most of them were conducted in and around Aizawl city. Considering the socio economic diversity of the North East their conclusions may have limited generality. Yet, they certainly show the directions for further research. The challenges to social work research in Mizoram are: (i) integration of social work theory, practice and research, (ii) testing social work models and approaches with field experiments, (iv) formulating and testing indigenous theories (v) deepening the understanding through the application

of qualitative and participatory methods, (vi) documentation and publications of studies in national and international journals. These remain to be co-opted within the vast paradigm of social work research which is continuing to grow.

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#### **Corresponding Author**

Easwaran Kanagaraj, Associate Professor, Mizoram University, Aizawl - 796 004. Mizoram.  
Email: mekanagaraj@gmail.com

## Deconstructing the Discourses on Manipuri Women

**RATNA HUIREM**

*Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar*

*Manipuri women are much adulated and glorified by various sections of society. The media also report their active participation in economic, civil and political life. This however represents only a slice of their lives. The larger picture that is woven around their private lives, which play out in a multitude of ways to define their place in society is invariably lost in this glorification. This paper traces the emergence of women, their participation in public life, and their glorification, to the epoch-making NupiLaan movement that took place in 1939. This event is observed to have sanctified women rising to the forefront in a variety of public concerns up to the present day. My paper intends to deconstruct this sanctified position accorded to Manipuri women. It analyses whether such public activism serves to unshackle them from the mundane but complex social challenges of being a woman. It examines their aspirations and the capacities they have to nurture their individual dreams independently. It argues that social realities confound them and they are not in tandem with their aspirations. The role of religion is also analyzed here. This paper thus tries to unearth their aspirations and the kind of realities they have to grapple with. Unique Individual achievements and excellence in any chosen field and the realities or challenges related thereto are not within the scope of this discussion. Rather it underlines how the paradox of public adulation tinged with private agonies complicate the understanding of the status of the Manipuri women.*

### **Innate Consciousness or Other Forces?**

Before getting into the nuances of the paper, I wish to clarify that Meiteis, Meitei Tribes and Meitei Pangals (Muslims) are together referred to as Manipuris as an ethnic group in common nomenclature. But the ethnonym Manipuri refers to the closer group of 'Meiteis'. Thus Manipuris can be understood as an exonym to encompass a wider group, whereas it is an endonym or autonym for the Meiteis. The endonym perspective is adopted in this paper and hence Meiteis and Manipuris have been used alternately. Manipuri women are sporadically and constantly lauded by the media as brave and courageous; especially for the active

roles they play in contemporary times. Noteworthy instances are that of IromSharmila fasting since the year 2000 for the cause of withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958; hordes of women joining the men in the spate of the protests against the extension of the Government of India's call for extension of the ceasefire to Manipur in 2001; women taking the lead in seeking action against the guilty, when a little girl called Luiningla Elizabeth was kidnapped and found murdered in 2003; and that of the group of twelve elderly women who bared themselves in 2004 in front of the gate of the Kangla Fort in Imphal, which was then the headquarters of the Assam Rifles as a retaliation to the rape of ThangjamManoramaby the Armed

forces. These are but a few striking instances of women coming to the forefront in contemporary times, besides the innumerable rendezvous of women engaged in bandhs, strikes, dharnas etc. for issues affecting the civil and political fabric of Manipuri Society. However, it remains to be tested and proven whether such kind of an active participation in these spheres by the Manipuri women is an innate act of individual as well as collective boldness and consciousness; or is it history, society and culture making them to put their act together. It is essential to understand this because my aim is to explore if these acts of boldness, whether individual or collective, is unfurled within the domestic confines too, related to other mundane affairs, barring civil and political life. I then go on to explore how it has affected their aspirations, and what are the realities they have to encounter.

### **Manipuri Women in the Political Economy of Manipur: A Historical Context**

History matters. It matters because mostly all societies tend to stand up in tacit solidarity of the forces that have played memorable roles in making their society the way it is, as they know it today. It can also be vice versa in that because society commemorates and glorifies that event, it assumes even more significance. Thus the nature of the event, and more so, the context of the event shapes peoples' perceptions and hence people tend to view it as significant or insignificant. This is how discourses shape perceptions, identities, opinions and activities in the social realm. A close examination of the role played by Manipuri women in historical

times, famously termed as the "Nupi (women) Laan (war)", proves to be a fine example of how intricately economy, polity and civil life are interrelated.

The active participation of Manipuri women in civil and political life can be traced back to the times of yore. In the ancient times, during the king's rule, much before menfolk started taking up arms as we know it today, Manipuri women led non-violent and peaceful movements against any injustice. They would also report any such acts of injustice, whether committed by the King himself or by his officials, to the King and thus seek justice. It is said that during Maharaj Chandrakirti's reign in Manipur, his wild game hunt for elephants (Shamutanba) was postponed upto the end of the harvest upon the representation of the women. However, there were two key incidents that marked the rise of the women's movement in Manipur. Popularly known as NupiLaan in Manipur's economic and political history, these two incidents happened during the time of British Superintendency; the first in 1904 and the second in 1939.

The chronicles of Manipur record that in 1904, the Assistant Superintendent's house was burnt and the people of Imphal were ordered to bring teak wood from Kabow (now in Myanmar) and to rebuild his house. The people protested against it, against which the Government ordered curfews. Despite this, women disobeyed the orders and entered the residence of the Political Agent and the Superintendent. The impact was so great that the Manipur Government required outside help to control the situation. Moreover, ultimately the British had to

build the houses at their own expense. This was a landmark event in the political history of Manipur, which is also perceived today as an overwhelming moment in the history not only of Manipuri women, but of Manipur itself. Another event though less noted in history was when, in 1925, the state authorities increased the water tax and there were widespread demonstrations against this measure. The main participants in this agitation were again women. Yambem (1976) asserts that we must note that these agitations were all led by the tradeswomen, as was the case during the women's agitation of 1939. It is thus pertinent to note how the marketplace occupied primarily by women even till today, has been the cradle of planned agitation by Manipuri women.

This particular event of 1939 was an epoch-making incident that marked the prominent rise and participation of Manipuri women in the state's political economy. It took place in December-January, 1938-39, when the harvest of Manipur was not satisfactory. The area under rice cultivation in Manipur between 1921 and 1939 increased by merely 18,838 acres, while the volume of rice exported increased by 2,92,174 maunds (One maund is equal to 37.3242 Kilograms in India). Thus domestic requirements were threatened. Rice export from Manipur reached an all-time record of 3,72,174 maunds in 1938, the year before the outbreak of the NupiLaan. Bad weather and increased exports resulted in severe shortage of rice. Women then filed a petition to the Darbar, (the highest original and appellate court, both in civil and criminal matters) to stop the rice export.

Thousands of women demonstrated before the Darbar Hall where their petition was being discussed. They insisted that the order to stop the rice export should be announced immediately. The Darbar announced the ban on exports but however agreed to the request of the Political Agent for the export of rice to the Kohima Civil Station. The Darbar not only reserved the right to stop this export anytime; it also expressed apprehensions about famine in Manipur. However, under another resolution passed on the same day, the Darbar approved a scheme whereby no rice could be exported from Manipur without the permission of the Political Agent. This was perceived as dubious and deceitful. Moreover, barring a few conditions of restraint, the actual ban lasted for only forty days from September 14 to November 21, 1939. It would perhaps not be wrong, therefore, to assume that the decision to re-open rice export trade by the Darbar on November 21, 1939, was taken under heavy pressure from the Maharaja, who in turn was pressurised by the Cart Tax monopolists and other merchants. This reopening of the rice export was directly responsible for the outbreak of NupiLaan on December 13, 1939 (Yambem, 1976).

It is important to note that Manipur is an agricultural economy, and even today, rice plays a crucial role in Manipuri society. Women are actively involved in the entire supply chain starting with sowing up to selling of the final produce in the market. Thus the significance and role of women in the economy of the state is indeed decisive, and a boycott of the market by them would mean a virtual hartal of the whole bazar, severely

affecting the economy (Yambem, 2011). However, since the objective of my paper is not to describe in detail about these historic events, but rather to establish context as to how these events marked the rise of Manipuri women as active participants in the political economy of Manipur, I end my narrative about these events here. Nevertheless, one must deeply appreciate the determination and collective participation amongst the women who agitated on that historic day, especially since the incident did not occur at the behest of any male leader; nor with their support and participation. Such boldness definitely is admirable and thus this event is sacrosanct in the annals of Manipuri history. The courage and strength of the Manipuri women of today springs forth from such a sanctified pedestal; and thus inherently acquires the aura of historical, cultural and societal sanction.

### **The Social Web of History, Economy and Polity**

It is popular knowledge today among social scientists, especially in India, that trading and vending of items ranging from items of daily consumption such as vegetables, indigenous fruits, fish (which forms a key component of Manipuri diet) etc. to goods such as the *Phanek* (the local sarong), *Innaphee* (traditional shawls worn by women along with the *Phanek*), and other handloom products are the domain of women in the marketplace. Dubbed as the "Ima (meaning mother) Market", where married women of all age groups (with a majority of them being above their forties) converge for trading and vending purposes, the famous

Khwairamband Bazaar in Imphal is a place pulsating with life and vigour. It is believed to have been founded by King Khagemba around the year 1580. Over two thousand women occupy regular stalls while an even larger number are seated outside, sometimes left at the mercy of the state administration for unlicensed hawking and vending. The whole market has always been managed by the women and persists till today. Apart from the economic activities, the market also plays the role of an important hub for social and political interaction. It was this aspect of the Khwairamband Bazaar that played a crucial role in the outbreak of the NupiLaan in 1939, which marked the strong rise of political consciousness among the people of Manipur (Yambem, 2011). Moreover, commonality of needs and aspirations also added flavour to the movement.

It is therefore pertinent for us to understand how and why women traders and vendors of Manipur emerged, assumed, and continue to remain significant economic actors. This can once again be traced back to history. Every able-bodied man had to render enormous feudal services during both war and peacetime at the time of the Kings' reign. This was known as "lallupkaba". Historical testimonies and the assertion of several scholars point out that the existence of this institution or system was responsible in pushing the women to take an active part in the family economy. Barua and Devi (2004) quote Brown (1879) and state, "This is some kind of forced labour prevalent in Manipur. This institution has very ancient origin in Manipur". They also describe how lallup was based on the

assumption that every male between the ages of 17 and 60 were required to render their services for the state, without remuneration for a certain number of days (There was no rigidly fixed number of days and varied as per the King's instructions.). This system was abolished in 1892. The noblemen of the society were however exempted from it, while the majority of the population had to undergo this process. Thus the system directly or indirectly compelled the women to take up an active role in economic activities. This consequently paved the way for a large section of women being engaged in trading and vending. Singh (1975) asserts that recruiting men thus appeared to be a system the King had adopted, in order to strengthen their forces against the continued hostility with the Burmese. Such a practice necessitated that the men would therefore frequently stay away from their homes, which further increased the responsibility of the Meitei women. They accordingly began to take up petty trade and also sought to acquire such skills and techniques as would help them attain self-reliance. As time passed, such petty trade and marketing became the monopoly of the women. Males were discouraged from encroaching upon this ascribed female domain of the economy to the extent that the kings punished those male members who tried to stay among the women traders. Collective resistance of women traders from encroachment upon their sphere of activities and the royal patronage that they received, further strengthened the position of women in trade and marketing. The significance of the women's market was thus reinforced by the fact that

proclamation of royal decrees, announcement of vital information, collection of taxes etc. all took place here. The fact that it is located in the heart of the capital and very close to the King's Palace helped. The women traders and vendors thus served as a vital channel of communication flow from the centre to the periphery. They brought news about events in various parts of the State when they came to the market and took back home whatever information they gathered while at work. Thus they participated in more than just a passive manner in the political economy of the State. Their profession made them interact not only among themselves but also with customers from all walks of life. They consequently acquired a strong sense of cohesiveness, solidarity, fearlessness, mutual dependency and co-operation through their professional engagements (Sanatomba, 2003).

Thus the role of women in Manipuri society was quite prominent from a very early stage. In 1886, Dun stated about the type of freedom enjoyed by the women of Manipur. He (1886) observed, "all the marketing is done by the women, all the works of buying and selling in public, carrying to and fro of articles to be sold, and whilst at home, they are busy employed in weaving and spinning". The Gazetteer of Manipur 1786 records that all the transactions of the kingdom were conducted by women in the open space and such activities took place in the mornings. These definitely have transformed now with both men and women being engaged in various acts of trading and vending. The exception is only of the Khwairamband market area, which is still dominated by

women, except for a few odd peddling and hawking by men. The marketplace is also abuzz with brisk activities from early morning till evening. New sheds and structures constructed by the government have replaced open spaces mostly; where the shopkeeper/ license holder has to pay tax for it. Women from all across Manipur come to this market to sell their wares as stated earlier. This is a glaring example of how these women are struggling for their existence. They are 'struggling' because studies suggest that it is not purely by sheer choice that a majority of them are engaged in these activities. It is often because that's the only choice they can make and have access to. This argument is substantiated in the later parts of the paper.

### **Role of Manipuri Men in the NupiLaan Movement**

It is essential to understand whether the men played any role in this particular movement because the coexistence of men and women in any society is natural. It is only the relations between them that differ, and the roles they play, which then go on to determine the type of society. Therefore, for a better analysis, I intend to explore and understand whether the Manipuri men played any kind of role; whether implicit or explicit during the NupiLaan movement. Yambem (1976) records that on December 12, 1939, the Branch Secretary of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha (NMM) along with others requested the elders of the Mahasabha to discuss the agitation of the women. The Mahasabha, however, declined to do so. It instead suggested that an appeal should be made to the Judicial Members of the Darbar. Unable to decide, these

members of the Mahasabha had no alternative but to wait for the arrival of the President of the Mahasabha, Hjam Irabot Singh, who was then away at Cachar. It is significant to note that the NMM was originally known as the Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha and was founded in Manipur in 1934 under the patronage of Maharaja Churachand Singh who was the president of the organization. All tasks were carried out by Hjam Irabot who was the vice-president. Irabot changed the name of the Sabha by dropping the Hindu off the original name and also changed it into a political party.

On December 13, a meeting called by the dissenting members of the Mahasabha was held at the Police Bazar, as the Khwairamband Bazar market was under a hartal. This was a small gathering which passed off peacefully. The President arrived in Imphal on December 16, and with this, the NupiLaan entered a new phase. The upsurge which so far had been led solely by the women, now received male support. The next day, the President called a meeting of the working committee of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha to discuss the NupiLaan. It was in this meeting that conflict between Irabot and other members were revealed. The other members of the Mahasabha were against the movement, and Irabot thus opted out of the Mahasabha. On December 24, 1939, he formed a new political organisation called Manipur PrajaSamelini at a meeting held at the Police Grounds (Yambem, 1976).

Thus abetted with renewed vigour through support from the men, the revolting women spoke up against the weakness of the Darbar members as well

as the unacceptable physical assault on the women with guns and bayonets by the state's functionaries. Unfortunately, this tumultuous uprising spearheaded by women and comprising only of women, came to an end, as a majority of the people began fleeing from Imphal for safety as the Second World War approached Manipur.

Regarding male participation, it may hence be hypothesized that if Irabot had not lent his support, the uprising may not have acquired the political tone that it eventually did, and may have remained purely a women's agitation. Adequate information is unavailable from known literature to prove or disprove this. However, it must be emphasized that despite the role of Irabot and the participation of men, it was and remains essentially a women's movement. The boycott of the market for more than one and a half years certainly convinced the state authorities that the women of Manipur could take up any form of agitation once they were convinced of their purpose. It would perhaps not be very far from the truth to conclude that the NupiLaan, which started as a rice export control agitation directed against the economic policies of the Maharaja and the Marwari monopolists, later on changed its character to become a movement for constitutional and administrative reforms in Manipur. The uniqueness of the movement, however, lies in the fact that after the end of the Second World War, which also broke out at that time, it was the women of Manipur who were at the forefront of change.

### **Women's Economic Contribution**

In the light of discussions about women

playing an active role in the civil and political life, which was manifested through the NupiLaan agitation. I once again reiterate that this agitation sprung from the fact that their economic avenues were being threatened by the uncontrolled export of rice from Manipur. I further assert that the economic contribution of Manipuri women especially in the family economy is profound. In the rural areas, it is a common sight to see women working in the paddy fields early in the morning. They also work as hired labour in others' paddy fields. Apart from this, every family in the rural areas of Manipur have a kitchen garden in the surrounding campus. The older women generally go to the market to sell their products. Very young and especially unmarried women do not engage in these activities. Walking two to three miles with basket loads of vegetables on their heads is quite a common sight. They thus help supplement the family's income. Both men and women alike engage in fishing too, as fish forms a significant part of the Manipuri diet.

Weaving is another very important source of income for women both in rural and urban areas. In the past, almost every married woman would receive a loom as a part of her marriage gifts from her parents. Manipuri women are extremely skilled in weaving and the handloom fabric of Manipur has always been an important commodity for export both in the Indian and international markets. The market-scene especially for such goods in Manipur is thus dominated by women. Embroidery is also an important source of income generation. Thus, women from earlier times itself have been very active in

small-scale internal trade and commerce. The hub of all commercial activities dealing with daily items are centered on women. It may consequently be inferred that active participation in the economic affairs of the household and in the unorganized sector ascribed an implicit position as well as necessity to the Manipuri women to participate in an equally active manner in civil and political life. Besides this, the self-consciousness to participate in such decision making that will affect their livelihood is another aspect.

### **Hinduisation and its Impact on Manipuri Society and Manipuri Women**

Although strands of Hinduism were reportedly penetrating into the Kingdom of Manipur as early as the fifteenth century (Sircar, 1984), it was in the early eighteenth century during the reign of Maharaja Garib Niwaz (1709-1748) that Vaishnavism spread in Manipur, particularly in the valley. It was then patronised as the royal religion and was further reinforced with the influx of Brahmins from North India, who gradually married the Manipuri women and settled down. The Meiteis, having embraced Hinduism, thereby, began to practice social stratification under the Hindu caste system. This had the effect of restricting the social relations between the 'sanskritised' Meiteis and the hill-tribes.

S. Bandopadhyay (2009) says:

Hinduism is a religion which has the innate capacity of assimilating easily other streams of ideas within itself in an absolute oneness. The main philosophy of the Vedic Hindu religion was that there was one god who was omnipresent

in all ages and places. He was worshipped in various ways and various forms but he remained the one and indivisible. All deities were but different forms and names of the same supreme god. The task of accepting the deities worshipped by the tribes, as a result of the Sanskritisation process would therefore gradually be assimilated into the fold of mainstream Hinduism.

Sircar (1984: 105) notes that the royal temple of Govindaji thus became the epicentre of a new elite culture under royal patronage. However, the Meitei traditional culture which had a strong base amongst the peasantry, could not be totally replaced by the new religion, which was perceived as an imposition by them. Traditional Lai (God) worship persisted as a part of Meitei family worship and Hinduism and the royal temple was accepted more as an institution created by the king than as a religion of the people. The Lai Haraoba (Merrymaking of the Gods) ceremony, an ancient Meitei ritual, thus continued to remain an important religious ritual of the people even during the height of the Vaishnava influence. It continues to remain so till today. Sircar also points out that in Meitei society, despite the patriarchal social structure, there is mutual partnership and respect between the sexes and women's power is not assertive at the cost of the prevailing 'harmony' in the man-woman relationship. She additionally talks about the recent renaissance of Meitei religious and cultural practices and the probabilities of de-Sanskritisation of Manipuri society. However, it is my observation that the lofty Hindu ideals of womanhood has been so entrenched in the Meitei society that it appears

unlikely for times to come that 'Meiteisation' and any such de-Sanskritisation would eventually lead to the reassertion of the social freedom of women. If any kind of assertion for women's place in society does occur, it will be attributed to other factors of the modern world and less due to de-sanskritisation.

It is nonetheless interesting to note that Meitei women are carving out for themselves a more prominent position in the Vaishnava religious system which had earlier relegated women to an inferior position in the religious structure (Sircar 1984: 108-111). One instance of such a niche in Vaishnavism is the Nupipala (Bandopadhyay, 2009). Vaishnavism is thus being sought to be moulded within and around Meitei religious practices thus making the process of assimilation unique where ethnic practices continue to abound. Dance and drama had been a significant part of Manipuri culture. Vaishnavism had thus adopted dance as an important tool in the process of sanskritisation of the Manipuris (Shakespeare, 1913).

Hinduism practices and propagates the concept of pollution and purity. If and when a Brahmin man marries a woman of a lower caste, their children are still Brahmin but the woman is not considered one amongst the Brahmins (Allen: 62). Moreover, non-Brahmin women are not permitted to cook for Brahmins (especially elders). In all totality, strict observance of caste rules were not prevalent in the public arena and this helped in greater participation of women in public life. They thus continued to engage freely in their activities of weaving, selling their wares, and engaging in various other ways of

economic sustenance. Women thus continued to play important roles in the economy and polity of the state. Dun (1975) also concurs that an important feature of the modern Manipuri society, which is quite unique for a Hindu society, is the prominent socio-economic role of the women. He further points out that despite their industriousness, women hold a very inferior position and are considered more as "goods and chattels" than as persons to be treated with honour and consideration (1975: 23). McCulloh (1980: 19) adds, "though useful and laborious (they) are but indifferently treated ... A man can put away his wife without any fault on her part, and if a person of influence, he may do so without it being noticed. Women are really the slave of her husband, they are sold in satisfaction of their debts". He argues that women thus become victims of polygamy and other forms of male oppression. All these discussions appear paradoxical because despite these Brahmannical practices related to purity, social evils like Sati and child marriage associated with Hinduism, did not rupture the Manipuri society (Shakespeare, 1913). Yet on the other hand, women's position as compared to men were always low.

In terms of pollution and purity, it is a common practice that no Hindu Vaishnavite woman is to enter the kitchen before taking a morning bath. Moreover, during her menstrual cycle, she is prohibited to enter the kitchen as well as come in physical contact with other male members of the household, especially elders. Thus we see that in the public arena, Hinduism did not pose much of a threat to the status of women. However, in the private domain, there

were staunch pollution and purity related practices, thus resulting in an inferior status particularly within the confines of families and households. These were thus instrumental in shaping societal opinion about women. Shakespear (1913: 417) also noted that regarding diet, Manipuris are very orthodox, and in many cases even more conventional than Hindus generally are today. He attributes these partly to the relative isolation of the Manipuris, and partly to their desire to distinguish themselves from the non-sanskritised Hill tribes, who have adopted Christianity instead around the later half of the nineteenth century.

#### **Hinduism and Women's Position: A Paradox**

Sircar (1984) reiterates that Brahmannical Hinduism, courtesy the royal patronage it had been receiving for the last four centuries, has not really worked its way to corrode the status of Manipuri women entirely. Despite being rooted in a more traditional and tribal-like social composition; women's economic independence, mutual support and solidarity continue to be the cornerstone around which Manipuri women realize their powers of being "Female" and of feminism. Continuing the argument about the paradoxical nature of women's status in Manipuri society, this proposition of Sircar is refutable on many accounts. Although historically Manipuri women came together towards striving for economic independence in the backdrop of necessity created by the absence of their men for prolonged periods (refer Lallup), the Meitei society is definitely not free from social exploitation of women

common in patriarchal set-ups. Sircar tries to maintain that there is 'acceptance' as well as 'defiance' of male superiority; but however cites more evidence of social injustice in the family structure and marriage customs of the Meitei. The Meitei woman is encouraged as well as expected to uphold the lofty ideals of patience and tolerance, as is the case with any other average Hindu woman, even in the course of a disturbed marriage. 'Male superiority' is emphasised in every sphere of Meitei family life, and the male child is accorded importance. It is my own observation that newly wedded couples are showered with good wishes from elders, relatives, friends, family members alike to be 'blessed' with a male child. Moreover, the Meitei society still practice polygamy especially in the rural hinterlands, on the pretext of bearing a male progeny. Historical records state that after the Manipuri-Burmese War of 1817, and the seven years of devastation of the Manipuri countryside that followed it, the male population of Manipur was greatly reduced. The Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, further reduced the male population of Manipur resulting in the greater acceptance of the practice of polygamy, and increased dependence on women for the upkeep of the family. It is assumed that this was one of the factors that promoted the practice of polygamy. Sircar (1984:81) also noted that the practice of polygamy is so common even in the urban areas of Manipur in recent times. This is further confirmed by my own observations. She however does not specify the existence of any collective resistance against such a degrading practice. It is once again my observation

as also corroborated by Sircar (1984: 85) that the only form of protest seems to be that of a passive individual gloom. Such a kind of resistance has no bearing upon the malady, and women continue to suffer. Ancient war time sex ratios cannot and must not be allowed to persist as any semblance of a justification for such a degrading practice.

Besides this anomaly of polygamy, another feature commonly seen in Meitei society is that of forceful abduction (Phaaba). A man may forcefully abduct a girl of his choice but it would be later interpreted as an elopement (Chenba). The latter is different because here it assumes that the girl went of her own free will and inducement of fear or force was not involved. Though a girl has the right to refuse marriage to her abductor, parents, friends and relatives generally convince her to do so as after such an abduction or elopement, her chances of marriage to another man especially as a first wife are highly grim. In the olden days, the fear of being kidnapped would constantly haunt an unmarried Meitei girl and restrict her movements. This also induced another dimension to the problem faced by the Manipuri women. It hampered her self-development especially in terms of attainment of education. However, with the advent of modernity and its resultant changes, the problem has taken a different dimension. Now, women in Manipur no longer prefer to confine themselves to the home and hearth. Whether such a factor has a direct bearing on violence against women in Manipur is yet to be tested. But crimes like rape that was unheard of in Manipuri society is acquiring a place of very significant concern today

as per news reports. This leaves the Manipuri women's position basically similar to that of women in any other part of India, despite her glorified economic independence, status, and self-expression. Sircar (1984:57) quotes a Meitei professor in this regard who said, "Do not feel deceived by the economic role of the Meitei women. In reality they have a much inferior status than men". Social norms impose an unseen expectation upon the Manipuri women to marry in order to gain social security. Social status is accorded to the woman who bears a male progeny. For instance, a woman who has a male child is selected to take the initiative while going with marriage proposals on behalf of friends and relatives. Such a woman is also given a pride of place in various rites and rituals related to the Meitei marriage, thus treating her presence as "auspicious". Besides this, the married woman is also expected to uphold all the qualities of a "good Hindu" woman. Reality is thus a far cry from the refrain adopted by scholars of the high social status of the 'independent' Manipuri woman. The picture portrayed and understood by various scholars that glorifies the Manipuri woman's independence, taking cues only from the eminence of the Khwairamband market and the role played by women in terms of public demonstrations related to civil and political issues is only one-sided. I will present in the later paragraphs some data related to why such glorification in the face of private agony induced by evils such as polygamy, taboos against women who have not borne male children, or inequalities even in day-to-day decision making, does not serve to undo their inferior status. Rather it

promotes a false myth of their independence and prowess. Hence, we can emphasise here that participation in economic as well as civil and political life did not really influence the social life and status of the Manipuri woman as her private domain remains fettered, which in turn have various implications in public life.

### **Slicing the Discourses that Stereotype Manipuri Women**

Feminist studies have been mirroring each other's arguments in several cases, where they attribute the low status of women to patriarchal practices in society. It is uncertain and can only be surmised whether ancient Manipuri society (Bimola, 1988) was matriarchal, like any other ancient society in the past. Scholars like John F McLennan (1865), Lewis Henry Morgan (1877), and Edward Burnett Tylor (1899) have strongly advocated the matriarchy theory. Other scholars like Riane Eisler have promoted matriarchal societies that worshipped an ancient great goddess. The depiction of the female as an ancient goddess in the form of Panthoibi, serves as evidence of the existence of a female goddess in Meitei religious practices. Mythologies of matriarchy also abound in various ancient societies. However, dated history records Manipur being ruled by a King and not by a Queen. Therefore, adopting Vaishnavism under the patronage of the then King of Manipur, wherein Hinduism was made the official religion of Manipur in 1717 A.D., cannot be cited as a cause of transformation from matriarchy to patriarchy. Nonetheless, the fact that with the advent of Hinduism in the early eighteenth century, things began to

change, especially for women has to be recognised.

Needless to reiterate though, the NupiLaan movement sprung forth amongst the section of population engaged widely in the Khwairamband market. However, the truth is that this glorified section of women actually long for change in their personal lives. Manipur is fairly lagging behind in terms of development in the all India scenario. For instance, the Planning Commission reports that the per capita income in Manipur is Rupees 27,332 as compared to Rupees 63,547 in Tamil Nadu and Rupees 63,549 in Gujarat, at current prices in 2009-10. Huirem (2008, unpublished thesis), analysed the aspirations of a section of the population in Khwairamband market with a view to understand their perspectives towards "the right to development". The findings are presented in the following paragraphs.

Only a small section of the women traders and vendors feel that their work is just enough to satisfy their basic needs, which could be attributed to the fact that several of them consider selling their wares as a way of keeping the tradition of weaving alive. It has already been mentioned earlier that weaving was practiced in all Meitei households and a young bride would compulsorily get a loom from her parents at the time of leaving her natal home on account of marriage. Besides this, it may be noted that since historical days, the women from the relatively better-off families would engage in production and sales of handloom products, as opposed to those engaged in trading and vending of vegetables and other items of daily consumption. Moreover, many elderly

women look forward to coming to the marketplace as a way of socialisation. What is noteworthy, however is that a larger majority underlined the lack of alternatives, the fatigue and drudgery involved, and their own compulsions for sustenance. These highlights the sense of helplessness and hopelessness amongst them. Family life and living standards too were unsatisfactory. The better educated and younger women are keen to have a regular salaried job. This once again underlines the sense of helplessness, lack of alternatives and the element of compulsion that is prevalent in their much glorified economic independence.

Age brings about a certain edge in terms of personal liberties. In certain households, family members were against their selling of wares in the market as their economic conditions had improved over time; with younger educated members earning better incomes. However, the women, especially the elderly, preferred carrying on with their routine work as it gave them a higher sense of self-worth owing to economic independence. Moreover, they also like it as they get to mingle with their peer-group and thus serves as a socialisation for them. In many cases, it had become an essential feature of their daily existence. Majority of them are purely on a daily wage existence, where the importance of education is yet to be appreciated. Thus low levels of education persist owing to affordability as well as lack of awareness of its significance. The common opinions were that girls were not sent to school in those days. They also questioned how a girl will benefit by going for higher studies. However, as is noted in all underpri-

vileged homes, majority of them felt that it is a girl's duty to help at home and also considering the economic constraints, it was better to educate the son who is a pillar of strength for their future. Moreover, besides the lack of awareness of the benefits of education, early marriage and distance of schools as well as the lack of access to girls' schools were also prominently cited. Data thus corroborates findings of several earlier studies on women that her plight is considerably lower than her male counterpart. She is always a victim of her family and society in terms of neglect and secondary treatment.

They feel disadvantaged owing to their economic condition and social status, as well as their gender. It is significant to note that despite their own low education background, they aspire for quality education for their children in the hope of a better life. They expressed that education will help secure employment as well as self-reliance. Such expressions by them underscore the fact that compulsions for sustenance keep them in their occupation of trading and vending. These are the harsh realities they have to live with. However, aspirations differ. So glorification of these women in terms of their economic independence serves only a myopic outlook.

### **Recontextualising the NupiLaan Movement and Status of Manipuri Women**

Social roles and tasks tend to get stereotyped on the basis of gender, propelled by intra-society as well as inter-society norms. Sobel (1993) firmly believes that occupational involvement generates strong political participation,

particularly, across homogeneous groups, and more so if the problem is also commonly felt. He hypothesizes that occupational involvement, other factors being constant, generates political participation, and that the influence from work to politics occurs across similar levels of formality. This was evident in the outbreak of the NupiLaan movement, where they had all the commonalities of work place, namely, khwairambandmarket; and the problem of unceasing rice export in a time of increasing scarcity, which was a problem of huge social and political magnitude that would affect all the families in Manipur.

According to Milbrath and Goel (1977: 53), "Political participation is a learned social role". Pateman (1970:42-43) further agrees that as participation increases, their own individual ability to participate also, the better able they become to do so. Mason (1982:60) has summed up very aptly by concluding that participation "breeds participation". Sobel (1993: 341) seals these arguments by stating that "regular repetition of similar activities including decision making develops as an orientation to action or inaction, the flow of influence runs generally from work to politics." He also makes a very interesting point here. He states:

Because influence transfers most directly across congruent levels of formality, formal occupational involvement, such as having enough authority to direct others, should generate more formal political involvement, such as electoral activity. In essence, the relationship occurs because exercising authority is formal and typically rule-oriented like voting.

Less formally structured occupational involvement such as participation in workplace decisions (work participation) should generate involvement in community activity that is similarly less formally structured.

The women primarily being studied are those who are coming for work at the Khwairambandmarket, which is an unorganised sector of the economy. It is naturally less formally structured. They are thus able to generate those kind of community activities that are less formally structured which are seen in contemporary Manipur such as protests, gheraoetc. To cooperate and coordinate for such momentary uprisings on various issues, which may or may not be long lived enough to become a movement, unlike the epoch-making NupiLaan movement requires relatively less formal structuring. However, to unshackle the woman from the chains of subordination requires a more formally structured involvement. Moreover, such public rallies and protests such as justice for those arrested without warrant, or encounter deaths, or abuse and violence against women during counter-insurgency operations, have a massive public sympathy wave. In the context of Manipur, there is no 'other' in these kinds of protests as it is in the larger public interest; and most importantly it involves both men and women alike. These take place in the public domain. However, what a woman is experiencing within her family is only best known to her; best disclosed by her; as well as best protected by her. Yet, whether it is domestic violence which no doubt occurs in their own private worlds; or the inferior status accorded to women; or the expectations that come

by virtue of being a Hindu; generating community involvement and participation to overcome them requires a far greater and stronger formal structure of participation and long lasting organised involvement. No doubt the collectivity of incidences that bundle up as a common issue that trouble public life for the Manipuris, namely, unfair treatment by armed personnel to men and women alike can be looked at from the lens of a social movement. Conversely, advocating the cause of private agonies, which have a much larger and life-encompassing social implications, is a different challenge, especially when it gender relations come into play.

To understand social movements further, the broad definition of a social movement given by McCarthy and Zald (1973) is presented:

It includes all who in any form support the general ideas of the movement. Social movements contain social movement organisations, the carrier organisations that consciously attempt to coordinate and mobilize supporters. In the traditional view, social movements are dependent upon their participating members.

They further add:

Social movements range from those that are radical and all-embracing, aimed at totally changing the structure of society, to specifically focussed reform attempts. They encompass idea movements aimed at changing the world by changing individual thought and movements tied to specific ideologies and tactics. At the level of social movement organisations they include in some degree radical and clandestine terrorist groups, retreatist sects that revalue the world, reform

oriented political action groups, and interest groups aimed at changing a law or policy to benefit its members.

Taking a cue from the above, one can very well argue that to bring about change in the Manipuri woman's private world as well as her social standing, all the requirements namely support, belief in a common ideology, participating members, and organisations are lacking. To date there has been no protest or rallies that propagate women's rights per se. All major unrests such as the rally against Thangjam Manorama, even though it concerned a woman, have been against one commonly identified adversary, namely, the state in general, and the armed forces in particular. Advocating the general cause of women has so far not been the top agenda for protests even if the issue concerned women and the agitations were led and participated by women only. Thus the valour of the Manipuri woman has always been limited to her upfront role in civil protests regarding matters related to the state's governance, and in more recent times, with a sole focus on the army's misdoings.

To take the argument further, we can seek answers as to why there is an absence of organised women's resistance to the humiliating and degrading practices like polygamy. In today's free-thinking era, is it still justified to look at the widowed woman a symbol of misfortune? Why are the norms of pollution and purity so strictly drawn only for women? Perhaps the Manipuri woman would once again come to the forefront if the handloom industry for which Manipur is famous, is gradually monopolised by mainland business

houses. Weaving and handloom, as stated earlier, acquires symbolic significance in Manipuri history and culture; and merits due attention. On the other hand, issues that will undo the prevailing gender dynamics require an unshackling of the deeply entrenched ideas of male-female position in society. It appears that Manipur will take a long time to achieve a state of gender equilibrium. There are some positive indicators though. For example, the Manipur Census Report (2011) reports that the sex ratio in Manipur was 978:1000 in 2001. It has become more favourable in 2011 and is recorded at 992:1000. The same Report also states that out of an increase of 457647 literates during the decade 2001 -2011, rural areas accounted for 229282 and urban areas 228365. Yet another important data is that the gap in literacy rate among males and females has reduced from 19.8 in 2001 to 13.7 in 2011. It is hoped that increased education will definitely end practices like polygamy and wipe out such other taboos that pertain to women.

Besides these, there are other causes for alarm too in the evolving Manipuri society. 46 rape cases, 34 cases of assault with the intent to outrage the modesty of a woman, and 21 domestic abuse cases were recorded in 2012. Moreover, 101 cases of kidnapping were also recorded in the same year. Besides, kidnapping, which has a semblance of social sanction in the context of "Phaaba" (stated earlier while discussing about Hinduism), the other incidences have been relatively unknown to Manipuri society. Another cause for concern is the increasing numbers of divorces. According to the State Family

Court Report, there were 150 divorces in 2011. This is despite the exaltation of the feminine virtues of submission and tolerance.

### **Summing Up**

We had noted in the earlier discussion related to the role of men in the success of the NupiLaan movement, albeit a late entry. Hence, it can be concluded that in the absence of equal if not strong participation by menfolk too, towards the emancipation of the status of Manipuri women, no movement can hold sway. The 'Meiteisation' and de-sanskritisation wave that is seen in contemporary Manipuri society and its impact on women is yet to be seen and tested. Except for a few odd instances of permitting and sanctifying female participation in rites and rituals that were earlier marked only for males, noteworthy instances of female deification is still rare to come by. In the discussion related to Hinduism, it had been highlighted how Sircar (1984) feels that women are not keen to assert themselves in ways where they feel that it will disturb the existing male-female harmony. Nonetheless, with the onset of modernity and its accompanying complexities, it is difficult to predict the trajectory. Moreover, increasing economic independence propelled by education in today's egalitarian oriented era will also serve as another force that will change Manipuri society and particularly the status of women.

Gee (2005) highlights that language is one of the key instruments in establishing the content of a discourse comprising of "social activities, identities and politics, far beyond 'giving and getting information'". Thus by

continually glorifying and filling the discourses on Manipuri women with such glories of public activism related to civil and political issues, the microcosm of their private lives as a "woman" in Manipuri society is lost in the macrocosm of the public acts of glory and heroism. Gee (2005:23) further argues thus:

We continually and actively build and rebuild our worlds not just through language but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies and distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling, and believing. Sometimes what we build is quite similar to what we have built before; sometimes it is not. But language-in-action is always and everywhere an active building process.

It will be interesting to see if the same group of women in the Khwairamband market who had spearheaded the glorious NupiLaan movement for a better Manipur will once again rise to the occasion on account of promoting an egalitarian society from a gender perspective. Having acquired a place of sanctity, women's agitations in Manipur today range from a variety of concerns related to agitations against domestic violence and rape. However, as stated earlier, these are yet to acquire an organised and committed involvement that can take on the shape of something close to a woman's rights movement. Moreover, these issues have never been able to garner explicit support from the men. In so far as one major section of the society, namely, men remain out of the context of involvement, it will be a gargantuan task to achieve a gender-egalitarian society. Besides this, in a

modernising world, the measures that they adopt such as moral policing, an example being KainaKatpa (any woman assumed to be found having an unacceptable relationship with a man is forced to marry each other), are not friendly for social development.

Individual lives are shaped largely by the societies in which we live in; and societies in turn are shaped largely by our social histories. This is of course not to deny the reverse process at both levels. However, the very detailed discussion about the social history of Manipuri women in this paper is aimed at demystifying the notions that prevail about these women. It also highlights how being at the forefront for all things that pertain to Manipur does not necessarily endow them with the power to espouse their own rights from the gender lens. To conclude, I reiterate that social action on the lines of a NupiLaan movement which was instrumental in turning around the state during crises like a near famine situation in its history may perhaps be desirable in pushing forward women's rights in Manipur.

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#### **Corresponding Author**

Ratna Huiem, Assistant Professor,  
Department of Social Work, Assam  
University, Silchar - 788011. Assam.  
Email: huiemratna@gmail.com