

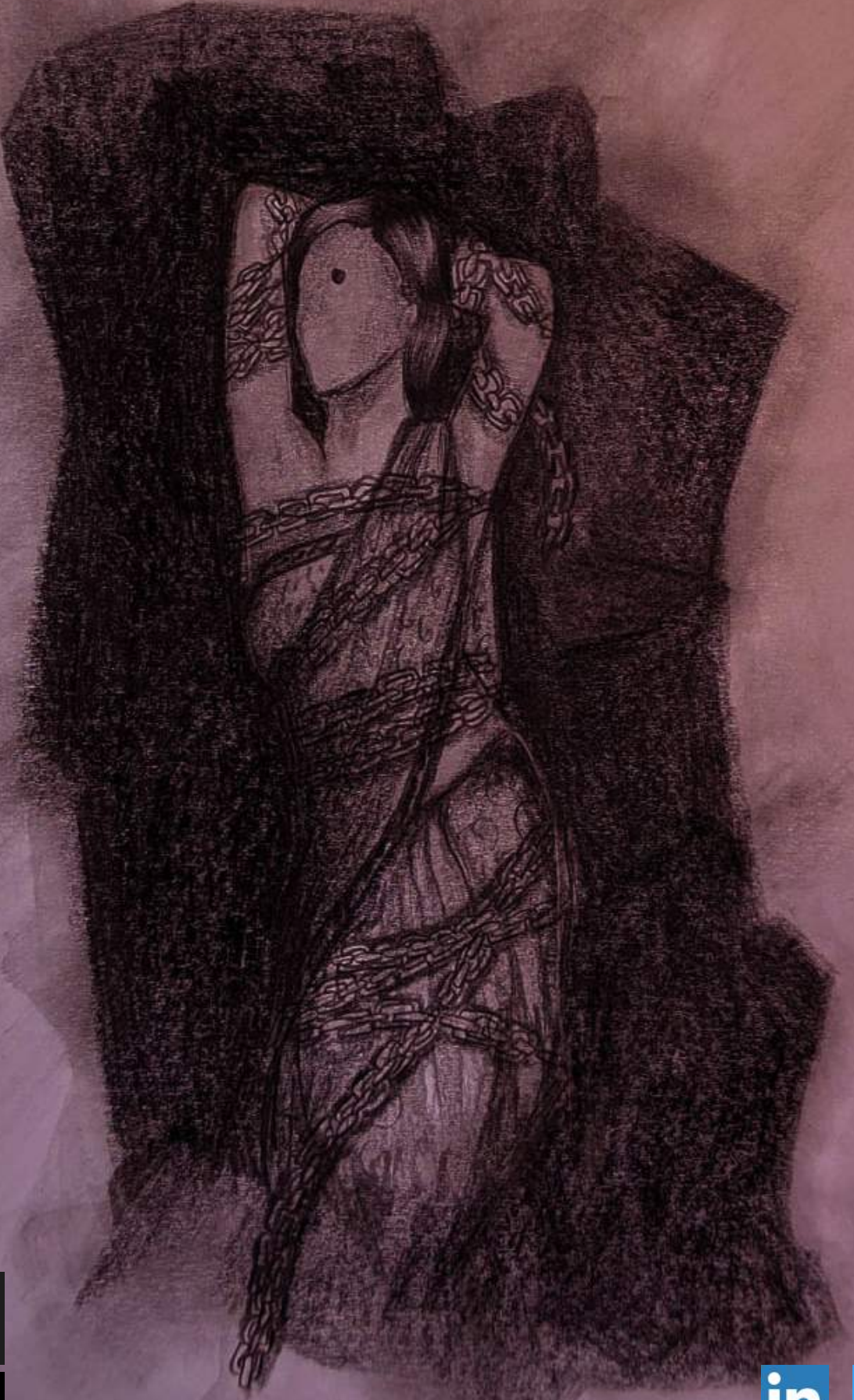


NOVEMBER 2020

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 4

AZAAD आवाज़

Patrika...



 **ICNES**
Centre for New Economics Studies

 **PAIGAM**



How many times have we come across someone suffering or being harassed, felt bad for them, considered helping them, but then looked the other way and moved on. This behaviour, termed as the 'bystander effect', is a psycho-social phenomenon where humans tend to help people less based on the assumption that someone else would step in. This behavioural tendency is exacerbated when the information we consume regularly depends on commercial capital generation and changes daily to keep the viewership interested and intact.

Our initiative Azaad आवाज़ aims to tackle an erosion of empathy in our society. This monthly magazine (Patrika) aims to focus on the marginalized sections whose voices are often muted in the cacophony of flashy mainstream media discourse. When referring to the marginalization, this platform does not aim to restrict itself to the traditional focus on social aggregates like caste and race alone but aspires to include a discussion on class, gender, sexual orientation etc.

*Azaad आवाज़ sculpted as a digital media station focuses on issues that debilitate the "deliberately silenced", drawing no boundaries and aspires to evolve and voice the needs of those silenced. The main theme focused for this monthly edition is : **"Violence Against Women: Deconstructing Patterns of Gender-Based Abuse."** This edition provides an in-depth perspective on the underlying issues and helps us understand the voices of those affected.*



For this month's Issue, *Azaad Awaaz* is centred on the theme of **"Violence against Women : Deconstructing Patterns of Gender-based Abuse"**. In India, as per the National Crime Reports Bureau (NCRB) 2019 data, there has been an increase of about 7.3% in crimes committed against women between 2018 and 2019. Exploring the deep fissures within this, one can come across the graded manner in which the violence is perpetrated. A majority of the cases (reported) involved 'cruelty by husband or his relatives' (30.9%) followed by 'assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty' (21.8%) and rape (7.9%).

Despite the country officially recording a total of about 4 lakh cases of crimes committed against women during 2019, this just features as the tip of the iceberg. It is often the social stigma attached to reporting the violence perpetrated against women that women prefer to remain silent. This is where India's social fabric- built on the appropriation of patriarchal social values- dictate 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' behaviour. This unwritten rule is more than often upheld by those who benefit from this system and serve as the judge, jury and executioner of who "deserves" such violence and who doesn't.

It is important to understand that women do not constitute a homogenous group but rather have various social markers that define their individuality. This could be on the basis of their caste, class, ethnicity, religion etc. The norm of violence against women is taken one step further when the question of a women's caste comes into the picture. Sexual aggression by the Upper Caste men to "tame" Dalit women is often normalised in a society which views the victim as "sexually impure". Here one can observe the intersectionality of both caste and gender as a social identity which makes them vulnerable to the violence. This structural violence can be explained by the social location of the Dalit women in the hierarchy and thus become a target of repeated forms of violence. As per the 2019 NCRB data, it was reported that nearly ten Dalit women were raped everyday across the country with Uttar Pradesh recording the highest crimes followed by Rajasthan.

Despite the public outcry created post the Nirbhaya rape case that took place in 2012 and the subsequent criminal legislative changes brought there have been no substantial changes in the situation. Factually, India still remains as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women. Despite the increase in the number of cases being reported post Nirbhaya, a very disturbing statistic that runs parallel to this is the low conviction rates. As per data available, only 25.5 of the rape cases have a successful conviction rate. This paints a grim picture as it highlights the crippled access to justice victim's face in terms of the biased investigations and subsequently paralysed prosecutions. This hostile environment marginalises women and makes them structurally vulnerable to forms of discriminatory violence.

For this month's *Patrika*, we explore the various forms of violence that are meted out against women and try to understand how it impacts different groups in different, graded manners.

For *Paigam-e-Awaaz*, this month we employ a critical gaze to understand the rise in domestic abuse during the time of the pandemic induced lockdown. For this conversation, we document our interview with Urvashi Batalia as she describes the rise in domestic abuse and details the correlations between emergencies and domestic violence.

Nazariya for this month explores the idea of women being seen as property and how the concept of consent and subsequent disregard for it courses through the veins of the Indian society. The piece also explores the unique nature of India's heteronormative social structure and how it strips away a woman's right to her own body.

For this month's *Samvaad*, we host a conversation with Dr Sowjanya Tamalapakula on the pattern of impurity being granted for violence against Dalit women in the process, she deconstructs the role of caste and it determines the sexual purity of a women.

For *Awaaz in Focus*, Dr Albeena Shakil explains the workplace violence that women face in terms of prejudices, social issues and barriers they face before and after entering the workplace. This explores both the physical aspect in terms of sexual assaults as well as the mental harassment that is being meted out against them.

Vichaar features Ms. Soma and Ms. Poonam who highlight the multidimensional forms of violence and discrimination faced by rural women, particularly women farmers in relation to land rights.

Lastly, *Talk Point* documents the efforts of various individuals in raising awareness to combat gender based violence.

Understanding Domestic Abuse Signs, Responses & The Way Forward.



PAIGAM Network and Sangh Collective, in conversation with Urvashi Batalia, discussed the issue of the rise in domestic abuse cases as a result of lockdown in India.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the whole world to a halt and forced everyone to lock up and stay home. While this was the only solution available to prevent the spread of the virus, it caused the rise of another crisis. Ever since the lockdown began, countries across the world have reported a sharp rise in cases of domestic abuse. In India alone, the number of cases reported this year are the highest the country has seen in the past 10 years. The National Commission for Women alone has received over 4,300 reports of domestic violence between march and September.

There is a direct impact of disasters on women, especially in the form of domestic violence. Emergencies are known to exacerbate domestic violence. Domestic violence is not limited to marital relationships or relationships in the nature of marriage. Women have also reported abuse by their husband's parents, siblings and members of their extended family.

The reasons behind this rise in domestic violence are a mixture of economic, social and emotional factors. Several studies have shown that marital conflict is often exacerbated by stress caused by loss of family members, livelihoods, home and limited resources. The lockdown caused vast unemployment across the world, leaving people stranded at home without an income, causing a great amount of worry and uncertainty. The additional and unique factor of being isolated at home and having no option to go outside, heightened tensions within the family. Such factors are seen to increase violence by husbands and intimate partners within the family.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 recognises three forms of domestic violence; emotional, physical and economic. The rise in cases of domestic violence is seen across all socio-economic classes however it impacts them in different ways. Domestic violence seems to be felt deeper in lower-income households where houses are smaller and living conditions

are more cramped. Other members of the family and surrounding neighbours are made to witness the violence more closely which causes a detrimental effect on children and the elderly.

Domestic violence cases are very difficult to report largely due to financial constraints and restricted mobility. Women are also often hesitant to file complaints due to the high cost of leaving the marriage or family, which many cannot afford due to financial dependence on the abuser. In these cases, women are also seen to make excuses for their husbands or partners and understate the extent of the abuse. There is also a deep stigma attached to domestic violence, which causes surrounding people to distance themselves from and turn a blind eye to incidents of abuse which further isolates and traps women who are caught in the cycle of abuse.

Due to the restrictions caused by COVID-19, there is limited assistance given to victims of domestic violence. Women's rights organisations fought to have police stations, shelters and other services for women to be listed as essential services and to be kept open for women to seek shelter in, to escape domestic violence at home. A number of states have thus opened hotline numbers that women can call to seek help. A complaint can also be filed with the District Magistrate of each town or city. Legal remedies, although available, are very difficult to obtain. The process is long and tedious which can take years to reach a resolution. Judges that hear these cases are mostly men whose mentalities still remain patriarchal and biased against women, which often gets in the way of justice.

It is thus all the more important to raise awareness of this sharp rise in domestic violence and to hold state authorities accountable for providing adequate services and remedies to assist women who are victims of abuse at home.



Violence Against Rural Women in Relation to Land Rights.

According to WHO, one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or/and sexual violence. However, Violence against women does not only entail physical or sexual violence but, takes many other forms such as psychological violence, or economical violence that is often overlooked. In this podcast, Dr. Soma and Ms. Poonam would draw the listener's attention to multidimensional forms of violence and discrimination against women, particularly women farmers in relation to land rights.

Dr. Soma and Ms. Poonam are both associated with MAKAAAM (Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch), with Dr. Soma being a founding member of MAKAAAM. MAKAAAM is a nationwide informal forum that works towards making women farmers in India more visible and helping them secure their rights. Their experience in the field has helped us get a deeper understanding of the situation of women in rural India and the violence they experience on a daily basis.



Dr. Soma Kishore Parthasarathy

Ms. Soma commenced with a brief overview of the reasons leading to violence against women in rural India, especially in the times of COVID. She presented the heart-wrenching reality of female sugarcane cultivators who were kept captive and in some cases forced to undergo a hysterectomy in order to be hired as contractual labourers. The podcast progresses to a conversation around land rights and the violence that stems out from issues related to ownership of land. As Ms. Poonam rightly pointed out, we are living in a country with progressive laws but a very oppressive social system. It is not only the government laws that have not been rightly enforced to subjugate violence against women but also the social mentality that propagates patriarchy and is preventing women to live as equals in society. It is important to note that these 'torch bearers' of patriarchy are not only men but even women who have internalised patriarchy and believe that punitive measures must be taken to punish those who try to break the social norm.



Ms. Poonam Kathuria

An important component of the podcast revolves around the impact of urbanisation and privatisation on women. Invisibilising the rights of women when it comes to accessing/privatising the common land or even designing policies itself shows that we have a long road to travel before women are treated equally to men. This podcast overall provides a detailed narrative voicing the plight of women in rural India. Touching upon crucial topics like social norms, data bias, government policies, inaccessibility to space, patriarchy, farmer's bill, etc. This podcast is thought-provoking and highlights the issues concerning violence against women that generally are not considered important enough to be discussed.

Access the Podcast:



Deconstructing the Treatment of Women as Property

Engagement of women in active paid employment has increased more than tenfold in the past century in the United States. Much of it can be attributed to the feminist propaganda spread by the government to keep the economy of the country afloat while all able bodied men were deployed on the front in the European continent during World War II. This was an interesting campaign to empower women and to encourage them to pick up tasks typically done by men. As empowering as the 'We Can Do it' poster with the lady, her red lipstick and bicep were, it's interesting to see how war crimes against women took another half century to be considered human rights violation by the UN in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993. Almost 30 years later there are still violations against women that are yet to be criminalised.

Crucial to this understanding is the concept of consent and the complete lack of regard for it, especially in the case of women, in Indian culture and society. Consent is the active agreement or permission given by an individual. To deprive someone of the right would be to imply that they are not rational independent individuals or are less capable of making their decisions. This is both dehumanizing and demeaning, especially when this right is taken away from a whole gender, under pretenses of protectiveness and tradition. Arranged marriages, on most occasions, operated on the very idea of denial of consent. It is traditional in South Asian culture to arrange a marriage, completely foregoing factors like the active enthusiasm and consent of both parties involved, hence paving the way for further violations of consensual sanctity in the relationship. This is one of the main links between marital rape and arranged marriages. Hegemonic familial structures enabling non-consensual marriage ensure impunity to the abuser and further encourages perpetration of intimate partner violence, a toxic cycle with one factor aiding the other, thus cementing patriarchy.

It is these heteronormative oppressive family structures that are so deeply entrenched in every sector of our society, that the concept of consent is considered almost invalid after marriage. In a marriage where the consent of the women is taken for granted, what are the chances of there being such considerations for sexual relations which are now considered a duty of the wife? (Bhat). The legality and legitimacy of a marriage is consummation and hence the lack of it is reason enough for an annulment, legally. This demonstrates how the foundation of a marriage is the establishment of further conjugal relations, irrespective of active adult consent. In such a case, laws against marital rape can be overly disruptive, almost threatening to the contemporary, patriarchal, oppressive family structure. Laws are a guideline, a structure, a means to achieve the ideal society that the nation aspires to achieve. It is quite revealing that there are so many policing hegemonic family structures.

An astute example of this would be the Restitution of Conjugal Rights, which ensure that a man, by law, is assured full access to his wife's

"Hegemonic familial structures enabling non-consensual marriage ensure impunity to the abuser and further encourages perpetration of intimate partner violence, a toxic cycle with one factor aiding the other, thus cementing patriarchy."

body, regardless of the women's consent, she is duty bound to provide him with legal heirs. Even by the judiciary, women's bodies are seen as property of the men, for a particular use case and duty bound to their service, penalised for establishing sexual autonomy which in such structures, is completely eroded for women. More often than not, courts have refused to even comment on the issue of marital rape. The only incident where criminalising this offence was even briefly spoken about was The Verma Committee in 2013, which was set up after the Nirbhaya Rape Case for starting a discourse on new laws to ensure women's safety, recommended removal of section 375 exception 2 which allows marital rape, but was eventually dismissed by the legislation 1.

Beyond the law, we can also identify and isolate these ideas in other cultural contexts available to us, as part of Hindu mythology, for example. The idea of women being treated as a property of the husband has been an issue almost as old as the genesis of our culture. In the ancient Indian epic of Mahabharata, Draupati the wife of the esteemed Pandavas is gambled away by her husband. She then goes on to challenge the validity of such a gamble as she raises the question of a wife being a man's property and whether he had any right to place a bet on her. This was the first time, or the oldest record we can find of this notion being challenged 1(Luthra).

In Ramayana, Goddess Sita, after 14 years of wrongful imprisonment by her abductor, is rescued only to return to her kingdom where she is asked by her husband to walk through fire to prove her sexual purity. This further demonstrates how central women's sexual 'purity' is to Brahmanical patriarchy.

The oppression of women to this extent where something as foundational as consent is taken away for them is a deep-rooted need to police women's sexuality. Motherhood is a biological fact whereas fatherhood is a sociological construct¹ (Menon), this can be very revealing when explaining why patriarchy has a need to police and control female sexuality and ensure that it was actually their progeny. This further introduced concepts of 'purity' and a new power dynamic into the institution of marriage. To ensure there was no habituation of sex in females.

This can be further demonstrated by how allegations of rape of married women are taken lightly or are considered arbitrary in a lot of cases. This is largely attributed to habituation of sex, that is naturally assumed in a marriage and how it restricts the ability to prove whether such a violation took place or not, as procuring physical proof like the extremely popular and inaccurate test of the presence of the hymen. This is to show that the testimony of the victim is never considered enough which can be very telling in terms of how deep rooted patriarchy is in our judicial and legal frameworks. To further avoid these habituations of self-awareness and sexual autonomy, girls are often left uneducated, illiterate, made to learn household chores and taught to be docile and obedient, in the hopes that they will grow up to be obedient, compliant women, who are easily dominated in the power dynamics in a family structure.

Marriage in India is seen as the 'other' for rape, the solution to rape, the way out. The discourse on institutions like marriage and patriarchy, and factors like sex and power that play an imperative role in their dynamics. It highlights the prerogative power of the state or the assumption that institutions like marriage assure security to the women on account of the superior status of men being secured by their supposed ability to offer such protection. Protection implies that women are material possessions that need to be safeguarded like the boundary wall around a house or jewellery and other valuables in a sealed metal vault. It suggests the idea that females should be protected because they are someone's' or in relation to a man, rather

"It suggests the idea that females should be protected because they are someone's' or in relation to a man, rather than because of their sanctity as another thinking, feeling human being, making up almost half of the world's population".

"It is this notion that the institution of marriage protects women and safeguards them, that is problematic as it, coupled with the irrelevance of consent, enables intimate partner violence and makes it so rampant and commonplace."

than because of their sanctity as another thinking, feeling human being, making up almost half of the world's population. This also explores twisted and misguided constructions of gendered subjectivity and kinship. It is this notion that the institution of marriage protects women and safeguards them, that is problematic as it, coupled with the irrelevance of consent, enables intimate partner violence and makes it so rampant and commonplace. It is this notion that bestows impunity onto the perpetrators and the lack of consequences further encourages this oppressive and abusive behaviour. This forms an almost inescapable cycle that arrests women's sexual autonomy completely and forces them to be dependent, second citizens without equal participation in decisions and choices with respect to themselves or others. It completely dehumanising and objectifying a capital possession to be owned, often demonstrated by terms used to refer to women like 'arm candy' and 'trophy wife'.

In conclusion, although both the institution and the issue of forced marriage and marital rape are often observed do exist singularly, it is astute that both these issues indicate the lack of consent in South Asian culture, among the South Asian diaspora more broadly. When a relationship like marriage is solely established for the purpose of having legal heirs to carry the family name forward and establish conjugal relations, without? The presence of actual enthusiastic adult consent, it cements the way for further violations in consensual autonomy in the future without any legal, cultural or social remedy.

Structural Gender Based Violence: Women and Workplace.

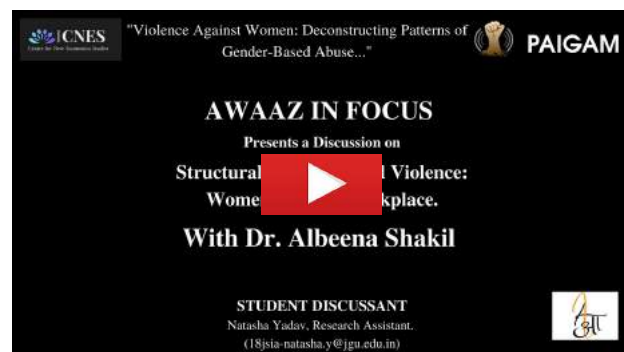
In conversation with Dr. Albeena Shakil.

Q. Constitutional laws on the prevention of women's harassment, in principle, with regards to their treatment in the workplace exist within India, such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. Despite existing, there is a lack of proper implementation, and a plethora of issues women face within the workplace. What are the social and political issues faced by women, especially within their professional sphere?

Let me start by making a reference to a 1999 status of women report brought out by the United Nations which said that women are over 50% of the world's population, they do two-thirds of the world's work, yet they earn one tenth of the world's wages and own one hundredth of the world's property. This report essentially summarises what the status of women at the turn of the century was, and we know that since then uh the figures for female employment have not improved by much.

With regards to sexual harassment at the workplace, the constitutional law in India got enacted in the year 2013, immediately after the anti-gang rape protests of 2012. The atrocious incident prompted a very big movement, wherein it seemed the entire country was discussing the violence women face. It was a wide democratization of the issue, wherein the government and the justice committee invited suggestions from people to counter such violence. The key demands that emerged were on the basis of the Supreme Courts Vishaka Guidelines of 1997, which looked into the case of workplace assault in Rajasthan. This guideline changed the parameter of the debate, for it said that if women are working, then one should presume that sexual harassment is taking place in that workplace. This guideline further suggested that each workplace should have a committee, headed by a woman. This committee should further include external parties and members such as NGOs, so that it can conduct fair inquiries upon complaints and allegations of sexual harassment. Employers responsibility was highlighted within these guidelines, wherein the Supreme Court suggested that employers must undertake continuous gender sensitisation and awareness campaigns and workshops.

Unfortunately, when women are making the transition from the domestic or the private to the public realm, they are seen as public sexual property. In the workplace, women wish to be assessed in terms of the work they do, yet are still seen through the male sexualised gaze. This can be very reducing and humiliating for women, and can have an adverse impact on women's health, sense of safety, and sense of security. When this movement thus broke out in 2012, it was the youth who demanded that this guideline should be made into law, and that its implementation should not be left to the discretion of workplaces.



Dr. Albeena Shakil.

Another issue is that there exists a very interesting paradox regarding women and work within India. If one looks at women and normally female labor participation rates, they'll find that women who have had access to and have completed higher education consist of a small percentage of the workforce, yet women with minimum-level or no education make up a large amount of the workforce! Yet education and awareness was vital for the rise of this movement.

"Women are over 50% of the world's population, they do two-thirds of the world's work, yet they earn one tenth of the world's wages and own one hundredth of the world's property."

The #MeToo Movement made an impact within India as well, wherein the two categories of workplace harassment were highlighted, these being the 'quid pro quo' harassment and the 'hostile environment' harassment. The former referred to 'a favour for a favour', which could also be used to make threats upon women. This was different from the other kinds of 'regular' harassment that women face, such as that on the streets and in public areas, as workplace abuse and such treatment could severely impact women's careers. There was a genuine fear of losing work or facing discrimination amongst competitors, if women denied or fought against such cases.

Q. Despite shifts and emphasis on female education and empowerment, India ranks low in terms of women participating in the labour market, as seen through the UN rankings such as the Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index. What are the challenges women face in entering the workforce within India?

I believe the biggest hindrance for working women is the entire idea that women are not supposed to work, that they are not supposed to work for wages, instead that they are just supposed to work in homes. This division of labor is very odd, as the male who's working outside has access to political and economic power, so constraining women within the home is not just an equal division of labor in any way.

There are so many double standards in terms of how we assess men and women, the fact that there is this idea that women should stay inside the homes, and while it is changing many are arguing that the increased violence against women is in fact a very adverse patriarchal backlash to women coming out of their homes. There's a lot of anger about it, there's a lot of desire to 'put women in their place'.

In India, there are additional complications which add to the cultural question. We know that over 60% of young women in India still get married off under the legal age of 18 years, this idea that you know girls are growing so they should just be married off. This leads to them becoming either daughters or wives or mothers or sisters, but not having an independent identity of their own. The biggest hindrance is the idea that women are not supposed to work. If they go out to work, there is a lot of unease about them, as they are not following the traditional gender roles.

Q. In your understanding, do you believe that an emphasis on girl-child education will cause a rise in the number of women in the labour market? With an increase in the access to education, will women be provided with more career opportunities? Will the structural prejudice shatter, or decline to a large extent, due to access to education?

In the early 1970s, there was a debate between social reformers and political reformers regarding gender and caste. A historic status of women report was brought out in the early 70s, and one central discussion that came about this report was regarding education, wherein it was felt that education should be gender-sensitive. Education is extremely valuable, it does a lot in terms of broadening the horizons of people, giving people access to thinking about vital issues and realities.

"The increased violence against women is in fact a very adverse patriarchal backlash to women coming out of their homes. There's a lot of anger about it, there's a lot of desire to 'put women in their place'".

Yet, our education is in many ways extremely gendered, for it also tells us how to be "good men" and "good women" in very subtle ways, throughout our studies. Since then, educational reforms are being demanded, with regards to how and what students are taught. However, as mentioned before, education does not automatically translate into participation in the labor market and workplace.

With regards to education, there is a lot of resentment within the country, for there are large gaps between people who have access to higher education, often called "liberal-elites", and those who do not have such access. Thus, it is found that more often than not it is the same family and generation receiving education. There is, however, a difference between first-generation women in the workplace, and those who follow after, in terms of social mentality.

With regards to education, there is a lot of resentment within the country, for there are large gaps between people who have access to higher education, often called "liberal-elites", and those who do not have such access. Thus, it is found that more often than not it is the same generation and family receiving education. There is, however, a difference between first-generation women in the workplace, and those who follow after, in terms of social mentality. There is a kind of difference in the sort of work environment one looks for, for example, those who receive higher education or are second-generation career women tend to look for particular jobs, and are not keen on being underemployed and unemployed.

"Our education is in many ways extremely gendered, for it also tells us how to be 'good men' and 'good women' in very subtle ways, throughout our studies".

Q. Following-up from our last question, to what extent, in your view, has the socioeconomic mindset shifted with regards to career-oriented women in India?

Despite the aforementioned law becoming mandatory, it's still not completely implemented. If a workplace or a corporation doesn't have such a committee, they must pay a fine of ₹50,000. There are very few workplaces that are implementing the law. We know that even after it has become mandatory most workplaces are just ignoring the law. There have been debates about incorporating it as a part of the companies act, yet there has been a lot of backlash against. Many claim that if the aforementioned were to occur, women employees would raise these issues too much, which would further affect their levels of employment, as companies would no longer wish to hire women.

There is a patriarchal backlash to assertive career women, people expect women to be of 'feminine nature', rather than have an assertive personality, or their intellect. It is a very complex terrain for career oriented women. To this day, even if they wish to give priority to their career, women are still battling very complex issues in terms of the domestic realm and the workplace. They are expected to focus on the former, and their relationships with friends and family, rather than their participation in the workplace. A lot of negative stereotypes do get attached to women, and yet despite that, women are breaking the glass ceiling everywhere. They are managing to work despite a lot of disadvantages, and are managing to break new grounds for other women.

Q. Could you please elaborate on the work efforts undertaken to help women enter the workforce? How often do you find such efforts to be implemented, or are they solely present on paper? Instead, what measures do you personally believe should be implemented to help such women?

Essentially, everybody who wants work, should get it, yet we know people face different challenges. Working women face more challenges, linked to other aspects of their identity as well. For instance, Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim women face a lot of backlash. The Prime Minister has a very good slogan on educating daughters, "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao", yet this slogan is an alteration of the former "Beti Bachao, Bahu Lao" slogan that came to be in 2014 due to the fear of "love jihad". See, the connection? It is there for us to assess you know what the continuities are between the two.

There is this idea that women are to be protected from dangers all around, be it from dangerous sexually predatory men, to harassment that occurs online, and other dangers. There is this entire obsession with you know somehow saving the daughters from sexual predators all around, and this gets complicated with issues of religion, community, and caste. If this discourse continues, the restrictions upon women will increase. Every-time there is an incident, restrictions get circulated immediately on women. So, it is a very hostile terrain, which makes it very difficult for women to break out into the public realm, as it is 'supposedly not for them'.

Instead, there should be policies within companies calling for better diversity in terms of gender. There are studies that have been conducted around the world which indicate that the more diversity a company has, the better it does in terms of decision making, as a wider range of viewpoints are considered. Thus, if there could be incentives in workplaces for employers, there may be a change.

There is, however, resistance from employers in this area. Many companies are resisting the idea of employing women, if the harassment protective act is completely implemented. They claim that a plethora of issues will arise from that in the workplace. I, however, do not believe much of a change will occur, unless the public dynamics and social mentalities shift with regards to women. This is a terrain where women still have to fight and find ways for themselves.

"There is a patriarchal backlash to assertive career women, people expect women to be of 'feminine nature', rather than have an assertive personality, or their intellect. It is a very complex terrain for career oriented women".

Sexual Violence Against Dalit Women and the Pattern of Impunity.



In this Samvaad discussion, Dr. Sowjanya Thamalpakula from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences guides us through the sexual violence committed against Dalit women and the pattern of impunity one can observe. She starts with discussing the Nirbhaya case that happened in 2012. In the process, she discusses in length of what might have actually moved the conscience of the nation in the nationwide protests that erupted post the Nirbhaya rape case. According to Dr. Sowjanya, the brutality of the event pricked the middle class, or the dominant caste, as she points out.

Dr. Sowjanya uses the idea of brutality to question the very reason why the Khairlanji Massacre, that involved the brutal rape of Surekha Bhotmunge and her children, did not evoke a similar response across the nation. To explain this, she uses the idea of how India doesn't consist of citizens but rather of different caste groups. She further substantiates this by arguing that it is this very discourse of India's social fabric that gets constituted by the dominant castes and is morally sanctioned by the Brahmanical value system. For Dr. Sowjanya, this value system teaches one about the sexual purity of women and thus decides who deserves empathy and who doesn't. She thus deciphers how the Nirbhaya rape case was seen as an undeserving victim whereas ironically the victims of the Khairlanji Massacre were seen as 'deserving' of the brutality meted out against them.

In the process, she stitches the narrative of how caste determines the sexual purity of a woman. Dr. Sowjanya speaks of how structurally Dalit women are stripped off their rights and are deprived off their sexual purity. The same structure also grants a dominant caste man access to the body of the Dalit women, only because it has been sanctioned by the caste system. She discuss in detail about how Dalit women are portrayed as being sexuality available as opposed to an Upper caste woman who is seen as pure, innocent and therefore must be protected. Whilst discussing the Khairlanji Massacre, Dr. Sowjanya also busts the myth of economic mobility being as the panacea for reducing caste based atrocities.

In fact, she argues with economic upward mobility, the aspect of caste becomes even more glaring and thus makes one more vulnerable to such caste based atrocities. Dr. Sowjanya then discusses the ever-growing attention that the idea of "Dalit Patriarchy" is gaining in the academic world. She further unfolds how the Dalit movements have been shaped and appropriated by patriarchal norms. She then goes on to vividly draw the example of the personal narrative of Baby Kamble, a Dalit activist and how she was not allowed to go outside by her own father. Through this, Dr. Sowjanya highlights the plight of the Dalit women and how they face a double whammy in the sense of being born both as a woman and having a certain caste ascribed to them.

The Role of the Civil Society: Changing Social Prejudices.

The focus of the Streedhan Association of Women's Development is on educational intervention and social advocacy. Prior to this, I worked with an organisation in Mumbai, which dealt with women who face domestic violence in Maharashtra. What I realised with my experience, is that there is an immense knowledge gap when it comes to our legal rights, reproductive rights, and such. There is a huge gap, even though there is legal reformation in the country, laws are being created, changes are occurring on that front. Yet, this does not translate into actual change for women, for there is a huge gap in understanding.

The idea was for Streedhan to do whatever possible to fill that gap, be it by conducting workshops, or by utilising the youth to make sure that the right and correct information is translated and spread across areas, specifically in low-income households, where there is a huge gap. Then, we realised that even when it comes to utilising your legal rights, there is a structure in place. Again, not many know how to utilise the law or what one must do to take a stand for themselves. Putting such information out there is what we focused upon through education intervention.

We've been very lucky, as certain state governments have been quite active with putting information out, and supporting organisations like ours. This is also where social advocacy comes into play, wherein we work on advocating for the right kind of change and policies that need to be created.

For example, one of the social advocacy campaigns we've been working on since lockdowns began is in the MHM (menstrual health and hygiene) space, as the government did not mention sanitary napkins as part of essential items. Due to the aforementioned, along with issues such as lack of affordability (an ongoing issue) and lack of accessibility, MHM became a large-scale issue during the lockdowns. In order to end "period poverty", most of the state governments are working on the distribution of disposable pads, without considering the environmental issues and the need for a sustainable solution. Currently, most of our social advocacy efforts are focused on getting the state governments to shift their policy to incorporate sustainable menstrual hygiene products, along with the menstrual hygiene products on informed choice, calling for the availability of correct information, so that women are able to make their own choices and decisions. And we believe that this stands true, irrespective of the space we are working in.

Most of our focus is on education intervention, be it through supporting individuals, social advocacy and advocating with state governments on issues. What we have been actively working on is menstrual hygiene and reproductive rights, as well as domestic violence, which is a continuous process, as it is an unfortunate issue which is quite prevalent across the country. This was our focus point since we started, which we continue to focus on, specifically in Maharashtra and the NCR region.



*Ms. Tanya Malik,
Streedhan.*

One of the most important things for us to do is to know our rights, to stay educated and to know what our rights are, and the other thing that I constantly young students is to use every possible platform you have around to have a dialogue to discuss issues and raise awareness and educate others around you. There is no particular method or platform to have this dialogue, we have to use every possible platform out there to be possible to have this dialogue and make sure it becomes a normalized conversation. Sometimes, when we do work with, or have a lot of young volunteers, we tell them that other than the active workshops that we conduct, make sure that you're doing something to help daily. It could be something as simple and easy as your household help, or somebody around your own house and colony. Just having a normal, regular conversation with them can empower people in ways which go a much longer way than what workshops actually end up doing.

The Role of the Civil Society: Changing Social Prejudices.

I would define gender-based violence as any kind of violence that is directed towards members of a particular gender. For a long time this meant women, but now slowly with increasing knowledge about the spectrum of gender and the large number of genders that are still getting to know of. Instead, it could also include people from the LGBTQIA+ community.

I believe that the social norms and their direct manifestations to be harmful towards women, that is the basic reason for any kind of gender-based violence, that is, patriarchal social norms. This begins from the moment a person is born and assigned a particular gender at birth, it is almost like a race to see which person best adheres to the social traits of their gender. Those who adhere best are almost 'rewarded' than those who do not, who are punished. So, social norms and their direct manifestations in the form of assigned roles are harmful.

For instance, the assigning of gender at birth based on reproductive organs as a social norm, and its direct manifestation on the idea of women behaving a certain way, and the cliches of pink for girls and blue for boys. This can lead to further issues. Take education and the workplace, statistics indicate that more men occupy higher positions in companies and organisations, but that is often the direct result of the fact that girls don't have access to schooling and education, or they are not the first choice in the family for schooling. So yes, the social norms translate into harmful repercussions towards women and the genders that are being targeted adversely.

Personally speaking, I'd say that since my masters I've been working with women issues. My M.A. was in Women's Studies and my M.Phil is also in Women's Studies. My B.A. was in Sociology, so knowing and learning about gender from that sociological viewpoint and then moving into a more streamlined discipline was one of the first ways I started understanding violence against women and other marginalised communities. That understanding, I feel, is one of the most subtle but very important ways to be able to counter such violence in any way. To counter violence is quite a broad term since violence could mean anything, and range in terms of what it contains. Personally speaking, from knowing about and understanding the different aspects of genders and how it shapes everything, from people, interactions, to personalities, to everything, was very important.

I've always personally been interested in intimate relationships and since my masters and also in my M.Phil right now that's the area I'm focusing upon. I feel that area is such an important area to understand gender-based violence and discrimination that works out in a very subtle understated manner that is often not automatically recognised. It is very cuckooed, the violence, just as the sphere of intimate relations have been. But, there is one of the most significant places where discrimination and violence take place. Following that, I also worked a year in a legal organisation called Association for Advocacy and Legal Initiatives, wherein I was in the team for research and advocacy.



*Ms. Himalika Mohanty,
Student, M.Phil.*

This is all very personal, it is what I am doing, but there are myriad ways, through which one can counter such violence in any way, because, again, to counter such violence is a really broad term and it could mean anything. Understanding the impact of sexist behaviour and harassment, as well as the ability to identify such behaviour, is needed. This is something in our own time, whether or not it is part of our discipline, we should become aware of, in order to help. Generally being aware of what is going on, there are so many laws, so many helpline numbers that help women, girls, members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Learning about these would be an important way to help you counter such violence, and these are just a few of the ways.



Ada Nagar

Ada is a Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.



Ashita Singh

Ashita is a Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.



Manya Sachdev

Manya is a Research Analyst and has created the illustrations on the title page and on page one.



Natasha Yadav

Natasha is a Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.



Sahil Philip

Sahil is a Senior Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.



Shrrijiet Roychowdhary

Shrrijiet is a Senior Research Assistant at the Centre for New Economics Studies.



Vanshika Shah

Vanshika is a Research Analyst at the Centre for New Economics Studies.

ADVISORY BOARD

Ms. Akriti Bhatia

Founder & Sahabhangi of PAIGAM.

Mr. Aditya Vardhan Singh Choudhary

Co-Founder & Sahabhangi: Media Technologies of PAIGAM.

Prof. (Dr.) Ambreen Agha

Associate Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs.

Prof. (Dr.) Lipika Kamra

Assistant Professor, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities.

Prof. Nisha Nair

Assistant Professor, Jindal Global Law School.

Prof. (Dr.) Sweta Sen

Assistant Professor, Jindal School of International Affairs.

Prof. (Dr.) Zaheer Abbas

Assistant Professor, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities.

