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The Covid -19 pandemic is crippling the social and economic system worldwide. Nations are struggling hard to tackle this pandemic. The local self-governments in Kerala along with KILA are also actively engaged in tackling the pandemic. This issue of KILA journal is prepared and published in this context.

The significance of this issue of KILA journal is that it focuses on Gender and Local Governance. The 73rd amendment to the Constitution of India envisions the local self-governments to ensure local economic development and social justice. This will not be complete until gender justice is ensured. Thus, this issue highlights the need for gender perspective in all developmental and governance processes of local self-governments.

Gender perspective in development means ensuring the participation of all gender sections of society in the developmental processes and implementing the projects and interventions identifying the special needs of women, transgenders and all gender minorities. One of the articles in this issue discusses about the gender concerns of democratic decentralisation process started in 1996 in Kerala. The tools like Women Component Plan, Gender Responsive Budgeting etc have been considered in the article.

Gender sensitive budget demands re-prioritisation of financial allocations by local self-governments to link economic governance to political governance and to enable women to direct economy through designing and constructing fiscal policy. The article "Local Governance and Gender Responsive Budgeting" discusses about the Gender Budgeting process in Urban Local Governments.

There is high rate of women's participation in collectives such as self-help groups which leads to the access of nutrition and healthcare. However, the extent of impact and the pathway is debated by different studies. It is very important to observe the positive association between women's empowerment and nutritional outcomes. But at the same time it is more important to evaluate the credit and savings pathway in order to evaluate the real impact. Article on "Linking Women's Access to Collectives to Dietary Diversity in Two Agrarian Settings: Agricultural Dual Households in India" deals with this topic.

"Reservation and Political Empowerment of Women in the Sphere of Local Self Government" analyses how far reservations have augmented political empowerment of women in local self-governments of West Bengal. It points out some issues that need to be looked at if reservation for women is to be effective.

The women and the less privileged in terms of gender, class and caste as usual seems to be the worst affected by the pandemic Covid-19. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the number of cases of physical and mental violence against women is likely to grow with multiple impacts on women's wellbeing, their sexual and reproductive health, mental health. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pointed out that "violence is not confined to the battlefield, and that for many

women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes”

Two of these articles deal with the violence experienced by women based on studies held in Kerala. Both very seriously points on the need for a collective effort to ‘break the roots’ that supports the growing shadow pandemic and make homes as safe zones to live. When policy initiatives are supported by local level bodies, there is so much possibility to ensure a gender just state.

One of the articles included in this journal addresses the deeply rooted prejudices, hostility and widespread discrimination against LGBTIQ community, as hampering their fundamental rights. It proposes deliberations on the strategic role the local self – governments should play in these issues.

The article “Combating Covid-19: Odisha Model of Empowering the Panchayats” shares the fact that the success stories coming from Odisha in their fight against the pandemic can be largely attributed to the role played by the local governments.

The local self-governments in Kerala, together with various other actors were able to control and deal with COVID-19 first wave. The well-established network consisting of elected representatives, officers, Kudumbashree- SHGs, Asha and Anganwadi workers, Palliative care network and Health system personnel proved to be a strength to deal with the pandemic in an orderly manner. There is a study included in this issue of the journal which explains how Kunnukara Gram Panchayat in Ernakulam District was able to control and deal with COVID-19 first wave notwithstanding the above challenges and holds significant pointers on how institutions and stakeholders in a local self-government can play a key role in dealing with a pandemic.

Financial literacy is gaining increasing importance as a policy objective in many countries. One of the papers explains how financial literacy levels of our country can be improved through local self-governments as their role is indispensable in development administration in every areas of our country.

An article on “Influx of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Issues of their Human Security and Employment Opportunities” urges for the Bangladesh government to keep its efforts to continue to encourage other governments to stay engaged and continue to address the pressing needs of the Rohingya refugees.

Hope this issue of the journal will be useful for all sections of the society in India and elsewhere for strengthening local governance and decentralisation.

We plan to bring the next issue of the journal as a Special issue focusing on the 25th year of People’s Plan Campaign in Kerala.

Contents

<i>Editorial</i>	i
<i>Gender Perspectives in Development: Kerala's Experience at the Local Level</i>	1
<i>Dr.Mridul Eapen</i>	
<i>Local Governance and Gender Responsive Budgeting: A Discourse on Smart Cities</i>	11
<i>Dr. Vibhuti Patel</i>	
<i>Linking Women's Access to Collectives to Dietary Diversity in Two Agrarian Settings: Agricultural Dual Households in India</i>	21
<i>Dr. Ruchira Bhattachaya & Dr. Sudeshma Maitra</i>	
<i>Reservation and Political Empowerment of Women in the Sphere of Local Self Government : West Bengal Scenario</i>	33
<i>Dr. Suparna Ganguly</i>	
<i>Sexual Harassment: Perspectives and Policy</i>	43
<i>Dr. Usha V.T</i>	
<i>Triggering of Domestic Violence in Times of Pandemic Curbs: A Case from Kerala</i>	51
<i>Dr.Nirmala Sanu George</i>	
<i>The Pursuit of Equality and Justice: Role of LSGs as Leveraging Agency for LGBTIQ Rights</i>	59
<i>Dr. Shalin Varghese & Akhil K K</i>	
<i>Combating Covid-19: Odisha Model of Empowering the Panchayats</i>	67
<i>Dr.P.P.Balan</i>	
<i>Role of Local Governments in combating COVID-19: A Case study of Kunnukara Grama Panchayath in Ernakulam District.</i>	77
<i>Dr.Nirmala Padmanabhan, Dr.Pearly Antony.O, Anna John, andV.R.Veda</i>	
<i>Local Self Governments and Financial Literacy In India</i>	87
<i>Arya. P.</i>	
<i>Resource Mobilization by Local Governments: Case Study of Kunnukara Panchayat in Ernakulam District</i>	95
<i>Ammu Sunil & Dr.Nirmala Padmanabhan</i>	
<i>Influx of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Issues of Human Security and Employment Opportunities</i>	103
<i>Dr. Mohammad Tarikul Islam</i>	

Gender Perspectives in Development: Kerala's Experience at the Local Level

There is urgent need to impart Government policy and Development outcomes with a gender perspective so as to make visible the women's contribution to the economy. The specific issues and needs of women should be specifically recognised as they are embedded in the social relations between women and men. A gender perspective in development means explicitly recognising the role of women and integrating it into policy. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is a powerful tool to ensure that development planning, financing, implementation and evaluation does not bypass women and girls through which gender inequalities can be addressed. Gender Budgeting is being done at the state level systematically in the thirteenth planning and some of the Local Governments also have undertaken Gender Responsive Budgeting and planning in a convergent manner.

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1. The Context

Development policy is supposedly concerned with resolving problems of poverty, deprivation and unemployment; however these problems are gender specific, is not sufficiently recognized. Introducing the concept of gender in planning circles makes it possible to view practices that are oppressive to women not solely as women's issues but as concerns deeply embedded in the social relations between women and men. (Jane L Parpart et al., 2000). While recognizing the fact that the discourse on gender has moved beyond heteronormativity, predicated on the gender binary- female/ male, largely accepted as the preferred or normal mode of sexual orientation, in this paper we focus primarily on the binary, which reflects the most pervasive gender inequality in society due to the unequal relations of power between women and men.

What determines these social relations, highly unequal for women, is the basic inequality which exists in society and needs to be recognised since upon this rests a whole structure of gender discriminatory practices disadvantageous to women. The inequality lies in the socially ascribed roles and responsibilities to men and women: inside and outside the household. (Kabeer, 2015). This separation in terms of household chores including family responsibilities and the public sphere is the visible face of a social order based on a sexual division of labour, that is, a distribution of tasks between men and women, according to which women are supposed to devote themselves first and foremost and "quite naturally" to the domestic and private sphere, while men devote their time and efforts to productive and public activities. (Baneria, 1995).

This distribution, which is far from being "complementary", has established a hierarchy of activities in which the "masculine" ones are assigned high value and the "feminine" ones, low value. Such a division of labour brings about unequal power relations between the genders and a host of discriminatory norms and practices, which oppress women.

2. Impact of Socially Constructed Roles

Impact of socially constructed roles is felt significantly in terms of norms of appropriate behaviour - girls/women to be quiet, submissive while boys/men are expected to be boisterous, adventurous and risk takers. This also has implications for the type of work/occupation, which women should do and men should do resulting in entrenched stereotypes. Also it creates the impression that women are not fully committed to work and cannot be risk takers

The Indian Constitution guarantees justice, dignity and equality for women. It also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. However, these values come in conflict with old patriarchal values and limit the progress towards gender equality.

Patriarchal social relations produced in the private sphere pervade most economic, social and political institutions. The term gender justice provides a direct reminder of this problem of institutionalized bias by prompting us that justice itself, in its conception and administration, is very often gendered, responding to a patriarchal standard derived from the domestic arena. (Goetz, 2007). As a result women and men occupy different social and economic positions within the household, workforce and community, which are structured in such a way as to leave women with little power economically, socially and politically, the flip side of which is men's socio-biological drive for mastery, manifested increasingly as violence against women.

Another serious implication of this division is the manner in which 'economic' is defined to include only those activities, which appear on the market and are exchanged for money. As a corollary it also defines a worker: to be economically active one has to be engaged in the production of economic goods and services. (Elson, 1991). However, a lot of the work women do is unrecognised, invisible, uncounted and either unremunerated or poorly remunerated since it is significantly in the production of non-marketed goods and services within the household which is unpaid and out of the National Income data. (Bakker, 1994).

There are serious inaccuracies in recording women's contribution to economic activity and estimating the proportion of women who are workers. (Hirway, 2015). The official statistics create the perception that the female work participation rate is very low in India — far lower than in most countries of the world. The fact is that women work to a far greater extent than men as measured by the data. Internationally, statistics show that if both women's paid work and their housework are taken into account, women are "overworked" compared to men. (Comanne, 2010). Also it is widely recognised that major barriers to women's labour force participation are those relating to women's domestic roles and responsibilities (constraining their participation) and the reflection of these on workplace structures.

To put it very strongly: we have to recognise the economic significance of the unpaid reproductive (household/care) sector and the need for public/community investment in these activities to reduce the burden on women as also creating awareness of the need to redistribute the work more equitably within households to enable women to be active agents in the development process. (Sampere, 2015: ILO, 2018). A gender perspective in development means explicitly recognising this role of women and integrating it into policy.

SDG 5 on “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” states in one of its sub targets :Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and family as nationally appropriate. Question is given such a role, What is the place of woman in the planned economy, including consideration of her social, economic and legal status, her right to hold any property, carry on any trade, profession or occupation, and remove all obstacles or handicaps in the way of realising an equal status and opportunity for women.

How can she best develop her powers and her abilities, in order to become a useful member of human society, endowed with equal rights and serving society according to her best capacity. How do we liberate women from every form of dependence and oppressive social norms and practices constraining her full equality. How do we stop violence against women.

With the persistent mismatch between government policy and development outcomes for women, attention became increasingly focused on macro development policy and the urgent need to impart it with a gender perspective so as to visibilise women’s contribution to the economy and address their specific needs. (Chakravarty, 2014).

One of the most important areas of macroeconomic policy and a point of entry which has gained widespread acceptance is Gender Budgeting (GB) since Budgets are not gender neutral. There is now an express realization that Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) or GB is a powerful tool to ensure that development planning, financing, implementation and evaluation does not bypass women and girls, and that this process becomes the medium through which gender inequalities can be addressed. (Budlender et al 2002; Sharp 2003; Yamini Mishra and Sinha, 2012).

The basic foundation of GRB is that it challenges the notion that a policy is gender neutral. It recognises the economic significance

of the unpaid reproductive (household/care) sector and the need for public investment in these activities.

3. Kerala's Experience

Development policy in Kerala has been more sensitive to gender equality in terms of human resource development as reflected in the much lower gender gap in basic capabilities, such as education and health. Kerala's high sex ratio, well above unity, has been the most widely discussed indicator of women's status and continues to be favourable to women, 1084. (Census of India, 2011).

Much has also been written about the high levels of female literacy in Kerala and their central role historically in the state's social development (Jeffrey, 1992), particularly in the dramatic decline in fertility in the seventies (total fertility rate declined from about 3.7 in the 70s to 1.8 in the 90s, that is below replacement level). In 2011 the literacy rate (of population 7 years +) for women in Kerala was 91.98 percent (65.46 for India) and for men 96.02 percent (82.14) much higher than all-India. (Kerala Economic Review, 2019).

However, the social transformation of Kerala over a prolonged period, though profound, was highly uneven and a symptom of this unevenness is the survival of feudal-patriarchal attitudes and institutions, even though women's literacy, education and health care standards and incidence of female-headed households are much higher than elsewhere in the country. Patriarchy in contemporary Kerala is apparent in a generalised social commitment to women's domestic role; perception of male as head of household remains strongly entrenched in society, women themselves internalising patriarchal values. High rates of literacy and impressive levels of female education did not translate into growth of paid employment for women nor into upward occupational mobility; recent data suggests a withdrawal from the labour force, largely because decent jobs are not available. (Eapen and Kodoth, 2001).

The growing uneasiness with Kerala's uneven social development is due to the rising visibility of gender based violence, especially domestic violence, very often linked to dowry demands, unemployment and low and declining work participation rates, mental ill-health, downtrends in women's property rights and rapid growth and spread of dowry, even as the levels of education continue to rise. (ibid., 2001).

The increasing influence of community, caste and religious identities are leading to more complex forms of women's subordination

with retrograde old customs taking newer and commercialised forms. These are undermining the pluralistic and secular ethos of Kerala and the notions of equality and justice that go back to the earlier period of reforms and progressive movements.

Needless to state, where the purpose is to change the social environment for women through a transformation of the structures, which perpetuate iniquitous gender relations, be it the family or institutions in the public sphere, solutions are not simple. (Maria Varela, 2008).

“How far has education broken down patriarchal structures” has obviously to move beyond gender parity in literacy rates to the gender differentiated patterns of education and skill acquisition and its impact on employment and earnings; the reproductive role of women and unequal sharing of household responsibilities between men and women and the impact on decision making and control over resources which continue to perpetuate women’s social and economic vulnerability. (Kerala Human Development Report, 2005). This called for urgent intervention by planners and policy makers.

The first big step taken officially to bring about change was in the context of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in the early 90s, which ushered in decentralization. In Kerala, the process of decentralised planning, was visualised very systematically and became institutionalised into different phases, starting at the bottom with the gram panchayat statutorily required to convene the assembly of citizens, the ‘gram sabha’ where local needs and interests were to be identified. (Mukerjee and Seema, 2000).

It is well known that Decentralised planning was taken up very seriously in Kerala through what came to be known as The People’s Plan Campaign hailed as a pioneering experiment in decentralised governance. (Eapen and Thomas, 2005).

4. Gender Planning at the Local Level

A pioneering dimension of decentralised planning was the conscious attempt to incorporate gender issues (through an understanding of the unequal gender relations, the primary responsibility of women in the domestic economy, their dual work burden and different needs) into the process of planning in the 9th Plan (1997-2002) and thereafter (a) by mandating that LSGIs should set apart 10 percent of the devolved plan funds for preparing projects that directly benefit women (women component plan) and (b) that gender

impact of all schemes had to be assessed. (Issac and Franke, 2000). In a sense it followed a twin-track approach towards gender equality, which combines focused actions aimed at women's empowerment and gender-aware actions in the mainstream of development projects or the composite projects which benefit both men and women.

It appears to be a first attempt in the country towards 'gender aware planning', with resources and women at decision making levels which threw up in principle, newer opportunities for management of economic and social resources, which would result in more favourable outcomes for women within the context of women's political empowerment. It is interesting to note how gender was introduced in the gram panchayats (GPs) to help people to perceive the discrimination that exists in their everyday lives--A questionnaire was circulated by a facilitator, followed by very brief, broad guidelines for formulating schemes under WCP.

Some corrections in terms of identifying women's needs and interests for a more appropriate use of budgetary funds, were made in the second year of its implementation. Conscious attempts were made to alter the conceptual rationale of planning under the decentralized regime by recognizing women's market and domestic roles, and gender differences in needs and interests. (Mukerjee and Seema, 2000).

Guidelines were evolved for designing women's projects and the allocation pattern changed considerably in favour of better quality projects and greater diversification in type of projects undertaken. (Issac and Franke, 2000). However, overall plan performance at the local level in relation to women's issues floundered despite these attempts since such recognition remained largely at the level of rhetoric in policy making and was not translated into appropriate projects at the level of implementation.

Several studies to review the WCP (Eapen and Thomas, 2005), largely critical of the outcomes though some success stories have also been identified. How to make projects and what should the project address are still issues being resolved. With the strong rejuvenation of local level Planning in the 13th Plan, new guidelines have been prepared for the WCP with some suggestions of women centric programmes and setting up a Gender Resource Centre to give gender aware planning a boost.

5. Gender Responsive Budgeting

Attention then turned to Gender Responsive Budgeting (or Gender Budgeting) as was being done in a number of countries/

regions, which I consider another major attempt by the state to make development more sensitive to gender, and a second turning point (after decentralisation) in approaches to gender in policy making.

Including gender into Budgeting has to go beyond numbers, to engage with visibilising women in each sector, recognising their contribution and emphasising the need to consider their needs/ interests in the overall determination of macro development policy and the extent to which allocations can be shifted towards social investment and provision of public goods. (Elson & Diane ,2011).

While Gender Budgeting is being done at the state level (more systematically in the 13th Plan), it has brought into focus a major limitation of the WCP at the local level which appears to have got bogged down in the 10 percent mandate. While it is true that certain programmes for women would be the responsibility of women and child sector- like those on gender based violence or setting up Gender Resource Centre/Jagrata Samithis, empowering women through physical training in self safety and so on, we need to understand and identify the needs of women/girls in other sectors, for instance like improving employment and earnings in traditional industries/IT/ITES/ MSMEs, fallow land cultivation in agriculture, or other agriculture related activities or 'care' services for children/elderly or cafes/ eateries in the services sector, or all types of construction activities in the construction sector, converging with the concerned sector and preparing appropriate projects for which financial allocations should be made.

Now that local level planning has undergone so much change from the preparation of the plans and approvals to implementation in a convergent manner, this should be the way we do Gender Budgeting at the local level. Very recently (based on information provided by KILA) a few panchayats (eg. Mooppainaadu Grama Panchayat and Noolppuzha Grama Panchayat) have undertaken Gender Responsive Budgeting, results of which need to be studied.

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KILA JOURNAL OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Articles Invited

Articles of theoretical and empirical nature on local governance and related areas are invited from policy makers, academicians, research scholars, professionals, extension workers, etc. for the bi-annual publication "KILA Journal of Local Governance"; Contributors are requested to submit the soft copy of their article together with abstract and CV by e-mail to the Editor at: **journal@kila.ac.in**

The abstract (containing 120 words on an average) should be attached separately.

The detailed CV of the author (s) should also be attached separately.

The articles submitted for publication will be subject to scrutiny by the experts. The editor reserves the freedom to revise the text.

The articles should:

- be in MS word format, typed in 1.5 space on A4 size paper, times new roman.
- be of around 2500 words.
- Tables/Graphs can be given only if it is unavoidable.
- number all footnotes serially at the end of the paper.
- provide references to author and year in the text in parenthesis.
eg. (Santhosh.K.P., 2006)
- have a complete and accurate bibliography, placed at the end of the text in the following order.

Author, year: title of the paper, publisher and place.

Eg. Argyris.G. 1997: Personality and Organisation, Haper and Row, New York.

All Correspondence, by email, to: journal@kila.ac.in

Local Governance and Gender Responsive Budgeting: A Discourse on Smart Cities

In the local self-government bodies, Gender Commitments concerning safety of women and children must be translated into Budgetary Commitment. By using our Right to Information, transparency /accountability for revenue generation & public expenditure can be ensured. For Reprioritisation in public spending towards gender justice, we must prepare our 'bottom-up budgets and lobby for its realisation in collaboration of civil society organisations with the elected representatives. Gender economists must lift the veil of statistical invisibility of the unpaid 'care economy' managed by poor women and highlight equality and efficiency dimensions of gender responsive budgeting and advocate for gender transformative financial inclusion in the macro-policies.

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1. Introduction

Urbanisation often goes hand in hand with a rise in urban violence and crime that manifests in terms of street harassment of women and girls, stalking, sexual violence, blackmailing and extortion rackets. Children and women are soft spots who can be victimized by predators. One such incident in the city is enough and the feeling of insecurity is spread like wildfire. It not only frightens girls and women; it controls every act they consider doing then onwards. Town planners, policy makers and budget experts need to do gender budgeting incorporating facets such as women-friendly civic infrastructure- water, sanitation, health care, safe transport, public toilets, helplines, skill development for crisis management and, safety at workplace. While making budgets for social defense services, consideration must be given to safety of girls and women and they should be educated on legal literacy such as POCSO Act, 2012 and Prevention of Sexual Harassment Workplace Act, 2013, special cells in the police department to act against display of pornographic images, SMS messages, cybercrimes that victimize young girls at public places, in public transport- buses, local trains, rickshaws and taxis. Women vendors and child workers, women employees working in the night shifts are highly exposed to unwanted sexual advances and petty harassment. Hence, budgetary allocation for referral centres/ information desks should be provided in markets and public places.

2. Law and Order Situation and Street Harassment

Conflicts in the city make women unsafe. Hostility between rival groups is played on bodies of women and girls in the form of rape, sexual harassment, provocation for physical assaults. Insular existence harms community spirit. Fear psychosis about safety of girls also increases incidences of child marriages. More budget allocation is needed for efficient running of Police Helplines -103, 1091 with the help of professional counsellors. To run One-stop crisis centers within public hospitals for women survivors of violence, there needs to make financial provision for salaries for doctors, counselling, emergency shelter and legal aid. Along with financial allocation, transparent guidelines for post trauma care, counseling, rehabilitation, compensation need to be provided so that funds can be used judiciously.

3. Urban Infrastructure and Safety of Women

From the point of view of macroeconomic policy, gender friendly infrastructure plays pivotal role in creating gender friendly cities (UN

Women, 2015). City planners need to make budgetary provision for safe housing and night shelter for homeless women, halfway homes for elderly women, information desk for women and children at railway stations/buses.

Road widening for 4 wheelers and heavy vehicles have taken toll of pavements. Mass of women who must walk on the streets get harassed by men in moving two-wheelers, three wheelers, four wheelers and trucks. Proper foot paths for pedestrians, vendors, hawkers whose presence ensures safety must be given as much importance as construction of bridges and flyovers. Budgetary allocation for installation of CCTV cameras must be made at all public places, highways and streets in the business hubs. Proper street lighting in the peripheral areas of the city is vital for safety of citizens, especially women, children and senior citizens. Regular safety audit by citizen's forum is important to identify unsafe areas. Safe, clean and free toilets for women at railway stations, bus stops, markets, public places are urgently required in the cities. Budgetary allocation for gender sensitization workshops for police personnel is important to change the mindset of 'victim-blaming' among them.

4. Advantages of safety for women

Feeling safe is to feel protected. It is a feeling of well-being which can envelop a family, a community, a neighbourhood and a city. Its composition is hard to decipher, but it is an all-encompassing feeling of calm which is often as invisible as clean unpolluted air and, inversely, when fear and anxiety take its place, that feeling is as palpable as though it was a physical reality. Safe cities ensure more freedom, less confinement & control and enhance women's opportunities to travel, to attain education-job-career.

5 Gender Budgeting in Urban Local Self-Government Bodies (ULBs)

With this perspective in mind, Urban Local Self Government Bodies must work for gender budgeting. Striving for 'Gender friendly' cities have become a strategic objective of the urban planners, policy makers and practitioners. Citizens' fora, community-based organizers and NGOs are publicly debating the issues concerning revenue generation and public expenditure of the urban bodies with gender lens. Right to information has proved to be an important tool in the hands of civil society for transparency in public expenditure (Patel, 2003a).

5.1 Municipal Budgets

In municipality, the Accounts Superintendent tables statement for income and expenditure in December. Also, he/she gives estimates of income and expenditure for the financial year end and seeks responses from Municipal commissioner, president of Municipality, and standing committee. Portion for committed fund cannot be changed by councillors at the time of final approval. Revision of property tax takes place once in 4 years. We need to integrate safety of women as a major concern in flagship centrally sponsored schemes such as JNNURM, PMSSY, NUHM are supposed to have 30% of funds as Women's Component.

There are three Sources of Income for Municipal councils/corporations:

1. State & Central government's Allocation, State and Centrally sponsored schemes
2. Revenues obtained through' local taxes-water, electricity, road, etc.
3. Funds obtained from the Finance Commissions

5.2 Gender Concerns

For past 15 years, gender economists and women's groups are making efforts to answer the following questions:

- How to enable women to direct economy through designing and constructing fiscal policy?
- How to link economic governance to political governance?
- How to enable EWRs to participate in the budget-making efforts?

They have used methods of Participatory Appraisal (PA) and Focus Group discussion (FGD) to identify gender concerns.

5.3 Macro-economic Policies and Gender Audit of Municipal Budgets

Trend analysis of allocation to social sector in the pre (before 1991) and post (after 1991) structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) phase has revealed that poor women have suffered the most due to drastic budgetary cuts in PDS and public health, safe public transport & childcare facilities, food security, drinking water and sanitation (Patel 2002). There is no gender mainstreaming with respect to safety of women in the budgets of ULBs.

Gender sensitive budget demands re-prioratisation of financial allocations by municipal bodies in favour of

- Working women's hostels, crèches, cheap eating facilities, public toilets
- Women friendly and SAFE public transport- local trains, Metro, buses
- Housing- subsidized for single/ deserted/ divorced/ widowed women
- Nutrition- strengthening PDS, mid-day meals
- Health- Abolition of user fees for BPL population, one stop crisis centres in public hospital for women/ girls/ children survivors of violence linked with shelter homes
- Skill training centres for women and tailor-made courses
- Safe, efficient, and cheap public Transport-bus, train, metro
- Water- Safe drinking water in the community centres
- Waste Management- Technological upgradation- Occupational health & safety of recycling workers/rag pickers
- Proper electrification in the communities
- Multipurpose Community centres, halfway homes for elderly and mentally disturbed women

6. Method of Revenue Generation

Several state governments have sent GR regarding allocation of 5% of total revenues for women and children. This should be increased to 10%. Kerala has done this. Moreover, urban local self-government (LSGs) bodies can raise revenues by heavy taxes on Tobacco, alcohol, private vehicles and entertainment industry. Portion of fine collected for causing damage to environment (introduction of Green Tax), high speed driving, wrong parking and breaking rules can be used for welfare of women and children.

Surcharge, earmarked charge for specific purpose such as Education Cess-2 % of salary, income tax for disaster management has raised revenues for urban LSG. In Maharashtra, transport cess at the time of Bangladesh war in 1971, later was diverted to EGS kitty.

7. Meetings with the stake holders

Urban LSGs should organize discussion on needs identified by EWRs with GOs, NGOs and SHGs. They should be made aware of Socio-economic Profile of the Municipality. The ward officers should

ensure scrutiny of needs and perceived problems by impartial experts who can also suggest methods to fulfil needs (Labour, land, services). Financial aspects of programmes and projects should be discussed in a transparent manner (Patel, 2003 b).

8. Tasks of Citizens Association

Civil society groups must be allowed to give their opinions on suitable budgetary allocations and generation of revenues from local sources. They can verify/cross check collected data and results of the surveys/interactive workshops and prepare a vision document. Sub-committees can work out details of different budget heads and it must have all stake groups of the ward. Presentation of reports of these sub-committees should be made through' EWRs to the municipal authorities. Currently women's groups are lobbying for reprioritization of allocation to reflect women's interests. E.g., Financial allocation for implementation of DV act, PCPNDT Act, utilisation of funds earmarked for Swadhar scheme for women in difficult circumstances and working women's hostels in urban centres.

9. Activity Mapping

Women's groups are discussing of microeconomics involved in dealing with problems faced by women at ward levels such as drinking water, health centers, garbage-disposal and are moving beyond grievance redressal. Women's groups such as Anandi (Ahmedabad), Alochana (Pune), Stree Mukti Sangathana (Mumbai), National alliance of women's Organisations (Bhubaneshwar), Sagamma Srinivas Foundation (Bangalore), Action India (Delhi) are organizing workshops for awareness about technicalities of budget, building knowledge about programmes, schemes, projects under different departments, gathering procedural information about critical issues/felt needs, skills of proposal writing. Stack groups in support of EWRs are Self Help Groups, gender sensitive administrators, corporators / councilors, individuals within political parties, NGOs and Women in the communities. They make efforts to seek allocation under appropriate budget heads to identify streams of revenue, available revenue and the required expenditure.

10. Some unresolved Issues

Decision-makers in the urban LSG bodies need to address the following issues demanding urgent attention:

- How to bridge the gap between notional allocation and actual allocation?

- Accounting, auditing, and record keeping of gender disaggregated data & allocation
- How to achieve physical and performance/ achievement targets?
- Implementation of maternity benefits, Tribal Sub Plan, Scheduled Caste Plan for the urban poor
- Major departments claiming indivisibilities of allocation of resources
- Notional allocation projected as real allocation
- Absence of uniform guidelines & procedures

11. Gender budgeting in Urban Local Governments

Process of gender budgeting demands special programmes targeting women based on enumeration of differential impact of expenditures across all sectors and services-gender disaggregated impact on literacy, school dropouts, mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, illnesses, safety & security. Hence, they need to ensure the review of equal opportunity policies and opportunities in the public sector-jobs, school education, wages, health care, skills, technical training, and computer education.

12. Allocation and expenses of resources for women in Panchayat Budgets

National Institute for Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) has recommended the following classification of financial allocation on schemes and programmes for gender audit as well as gender budgeting (Patel, 2004).

- Women specific schemes where 100 % of the allocation is required to be spent on women targeted 100% to women by Ministry of women and Child Development (MWCD).
- Pro-women scheme where at least 30% of allocation and benefits flow to women. E.g., all anti-poverty programmes.
- Gender Neutral Schemes meant for community (Employment generation programmes, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)
- Residual schemes for disaster management

All India Institute of Local Self Government, AIILSG gives details of all schemes under these 4 categories through its publications, workshops and training programmes (Virmani, 1999). Moreover, it also teaches the elected representatives the efficient ways of programme implementation through budgeting from below:

i. Enhanced budgetary allocation for Protective and Welfare Services

These are the schemes directly benefiting women for crisis management of situations arising out of economic and socio-cultural subordination and dehumanisation of women such as shelter homes, short stay homes and rehabilitation schemes for women survivors of violence, pensions for widows and destitute women, help lines for women survivors of violence.

ii. Increase in budgetary allocation for Social Services Expenditure for capacity building, reduction of domestic drudgery and better quality of life for girls and women

Primary, secondary and higher education and vocational training for school/college dropout girls, overall health needs of girls and women from womb to tomb, Crèche, Working women's hostels, Housing, Nutrition, Water supply, Sanitation-toilets, drainage, fuel, waste management and safe public transport.

iii. Quantum leap in budgetary allocation for Economic Services to provide economic opportunities to women

- SHGs-credit, loans to self-employed women
- Training programmes-Vocational training in Sunrise sectors. E.g., Biotechnology, IT, etc.
- Physical infrastructure-transport, energy
- Urban housing-10 % reserved flats/tenements for single women
- Marketing facilities for women entrepreneurs & self-employed women- 10% of shops reserved for businesswomen, women vendors/traders in municipal markets, women's haats /bazars
- Public Toilets for women without user fees
- Safe and efficient transport for working women and women vendors

iv. Budgetary allocation for Regulatory Services to put in place institutional structures and mechanisms

- State Commission for Women/ Municipal Commission for Women
- Women Development Cell in municipal bodies
- Budgetary allocation and space for ward-wise WDC for prevention of sexual harassment of women in the organised and unorganised sectors

- Women's cell at the police stations, LSG bodies' offices, municipal hospital & schools
- Awareness generation programmes on women's legal rights and gender sensitization of government employees, officers, law and order machinery and citizens
- Implementation of Pre-Conception and Pre Natal-Diagnostic (Regulation) Act (2002), Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2005), Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (2012), Prevention of sexual harassment of women at Workplaces Act (2013)

13. Need of an Hour

State governments must devolve substantive powers, funds, functions and functionaries upon urban LSG bodies. The central government should strive for simplifications of programme guidelines by central ministries and departments regarding women specific schemes- Swadhar, working women's hostels, maternity benefits for BPL, etc. Moreover, centrally sponsored Schemes must be recast to empower municipal bodies. PRIs must get untied funds to formulate plans according to their needs and priorities. Structures and mechanisms for RTI Act must be put in place to sort out problems concerning utilisation of funds allocated for area development. To avoid urban unrest and guarantee socio-economic justice, at least 100 days of employment at minimum wages must be provided under EGS in all urban centres.

14. Financial Matters and LSGs

Elected representatives, ward officials and NGOs working in the area should act as facilitators in preparation of the plan for area development and social justice programmes of the rural and urban local self-government bodies. The UN system has supported allocation of resources for women in PRIs, right from the beginning. "The evidence on gender and decentralisation in India thus suggests that while women have played a positive role in addressing, or attempting to address, a range of practical gender needs, their impact on strategic gender needs is not remarkable." Hence, WERs deserve to be empowered to address the strategic gender needs.

There is a need for provisions in the composite programmes under education, health and skill development to target them specifically at girls/women as the principal beneficiaries and disaggregated within the total allocation. It may also be necessary to place restrictions on their re-appropriation for other purposes.

15. Conclusion

Budgets garner resources through the taxation policies and allocate resources to different sections of the economy. Budget is an important tool in the hands of state for affirmative action for improvement of gender relations through reduction of gender gap in the development process. It can help to reduce economic inequalities, between men and women as well as between the rich and the poor. Hence, the budgetary policies need to keep into considerations the gender dynamics operating in the economy and in the civil society. There is a need to highlight participatory approaches to pro-poor budgeting, bottom-up budget, child budget, SC budget, ST budget, green budgeting, budgeting for differently abled people, local and global implications of pro-poor and pro-women budgeting, alternative macro scenarios emerging out of alternative budgets and inter-linkages between gender-sensitive budgeting and women's empowerment. Serious examining of budgets calls for greater transparency at the level of international economics to local processes of empowerment. There is a need to provide training and capacity building workshops for decision-makers in the government structures, municipal bodies, parliamentarians and audio-visual.

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Linking Women's Access to Collectives to Dietary Diversity in Two Agrarian Settings: Agricultural Dual Households in India

There is multiple evidence around the world of women's participation in collectives such as self-help groups leading to better access to nutrition and healthcare. However, the extent of impact and the pathway is debated by different studies. This paper empirically measured the effect of women's access to and participation in SHG, FPO and other collectives with their nutritional intake. Dietary diversity score of women has been taken as an indicator of nutritional intake in this study. Using univariate, bi-variate and multi-variate methods on a cross-sectional survey of 1148 primary members (575 men and 573 women) in 574 rural households, conducted in 2019, the study finds variations in the nature of empirical association between group membership, access to credit and savings and women's dietary diversity score. Active participation in groups, such as SHGs and FPOs, show significant increase in diet quality, but the credit and savings pathway don't show a significant impact. Agrarian system also plays a role as the significant odds is observed only in the semi-arid or arid systems. Based on the study it is recommended that leadership development of women – especially for the non-Hindu SC/ST women through active group-membership should be promoted as key nutrition strategy.

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1. Introduction

There is multiple evidence around the world of women's participation in collectives such as self-help groups leading to better access to nutrition and healthcare (Kumar, 2006; Sundaram, 2012; Feruglio & Nisbett, 2018). Self-help groups not only affect women directly by providing access to information and funds, but also have an indirect effect of women's wellbeing through agency and self-worth (Mohiuddin et al. 2002; Moyle, Dollard & Biswas, 2006; Sundaram, 2012). The studies exploring linkages of nutrition with participation in collectives other than SHGs for women are, however, rare. The extent of impact of such collective participation of women also varies in different studies. In India, after the COVID 19-led economic lockdown, there has been a consensus among policy makers and practitioners that Self-Help groups should be re-capitalised for mitigating some of the distress emerging from lockdown. In this context we, empirically measure the effect of women's access to and participation in SHG, FPO and other collectives with their nutritional intake. Dietary diversity score of women has been taken as an indicator of nutritional intake in this study.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Question

The paper explores (a) whether dietary diversity score of women improves with greater access to collectives and community-based organizations and (b) whether this association varies in different agrarian systems with different degrees of access to food variety. The paper uses a cross-sectional design based on a sample of 1148 Primary members (575 men and 573 women) in 574 rural households, conducted from March to May 2019. It uses a logistic model for extracting adjusted odds ratio of the dependent variable (dietary diversity score) and the key independent variable (community group participation) interacted with agrarian systems, controlling for socio-demographic attributes.

2.2. Data and Sample

The sampling was based on secondary sources of NSSO Employment Unemployment Survey 2011-12 (68h Rounds) and NFHS IV (2015-16) which provide detailed data on women's autonomy, participation in agriculture and nutritional outcome at a district level. Agricultural regions were our first stage units of sample. We selected two major agrarian regions – one which is producing staple food such as the rice-wheat producing “Sub-humid” regions (coastal excluded)

and the other which conducting dry farming or producing non-food crops i.e. “Semi-arid” Regions (arid excluded). These agro-ecological regions– sub-humid and semi-arid regions were identified using Meso-data base of ICRISAT.

After identifying the first stage units, we moved on to identify the second stage units i.e. the states, to draw the samples for this study. Although, political state boundaries do not conform to ecological boundaries, we selected states as they have homogeneity regarding language, food and cultural practices which are roughly similar within state boundaries. There is also some administrative convenience as most of the socio-economic data is available at the state level.

To identify the states we used information on % of women in farming (rural) using the NSS EUS (68th Round) 2011 data (NIC 2008 codes 01 to 03) and % of women who rank above 0.6 in Average Index of Autonomy (rural) from the NFHS Data 2015. The index was constructed from responses of women in 15-49 age group in the women questionnaire. The woman is coded 1 if (a) employed in last 12 months, (b) If working, self or jointly can decide how cash earning is used, (c) self or jointly decides on healthcare, (d) decides on major household purchases, (e) can visit to her family and relatives, (f) has money that she alone can decide how to use, (g) has bank or savings account that respondent uses, (h) knows any programme in the area that give loans to women to start or expand a business, (i) accessed microcredit, (j) usually allowed to go to market/ health facility/ outside village, (k) owns a house/land, (l) has mobile phone for own use, (m) can read text message in the phone. Average across the coded indicators (a. to m.) was computed as autonomy score (Range: 0 to 1).

We ranked women in the sum of these two indicators (% in farm sector and % with autonomy score above 0.6) by states within each Agro-ecological region. Within each Agro-ecological region we selected states with maximum and minimum performance in women in farming and % of women with autonomy score >0.6.

State 1: $\text{Min} \sum (\% \text{ of Women in farming sector} + \% \text{ women with Autonomy Score} > 0.6)$

State 2: $\text{Max} \sum (\% \text{ of Women in farming sector} + \% \text{ women with Autonomy Score} > 0.6)$

Within each state further selection of third stage units i.e. districts were identified using the same set of criteria.

District 1: $\text{Min } \sum (\% \text{ of Women in farming sector} + \% \text{ women with Autonomy Score} > 0.6)$

District 2: $\text{Max } \sum (\% \text{ of Women in farming sector} + \% \text{ women with Autonomy Score} > 0.6)$

The States, although conforming broadly to the Agro-ecological meso-regions, had mix of districts that fell out of the ecological regions selected. While ranking districts, we included only those districts that fell either on Sub-humid or semi-arid ecological zones. After selecting the districts, at the final stage, within each district (one worst district and one best in each state: total $4 \times 2 = 8$ districts), we randomly selected the Blocks. Within the Blocks, Gram Panchayats were also randomly selected.

After identifying the blocks, local administration (Panchayat Secretary and Block Development Officers) was contacted to provide contacts of agricultural dual households i.e. agricultural households with an adult man and an adult woman (Malapit et al. 2015b). A random sampling of households was done out of the list of households. If a household did not cooperate or did not indulge in agriculture in the last season (Rabi: November 2018 to March 2019), the household was dropped. The enumerators moved to the next closest agricultural household in the village. In some cases, more than one village had to be surveyed to complete the sample size (Table 1).

Table 1: Description of the Sampling Frame and Study Area

Unit 1 Region	Semi-arid				Sub-humid			
Unit 2 State	Telangana		Tamil Nadu		Madhya Pradesh		Punjab	
Unit 3 District	Vikarabad	Karim Nagar	Virudhu Nagar	Erode	Sidhi	Hoshangabad	SBS Nagar	Mansa
Block/ GP	Mubarakpur, Keshavpally, Nawabpet Syedalipur and Yethrajally	Laxmipur	Chithapuram, Valangi, Kovilangulam, and Gopalapuram	Solarpatti, Nagamanacempalayam, Muruganpalayam, Panna-palayam, Valanthankottai and Icchipalayam	Pikiniyan and Kuwan Panchayati	Baokhedi Kalan Village and Bhiladia	Sahungra and Sujawalpur	Sardulewala, Alhupur and Khairakalan

Source: By the authors.

2.3. Indicators for the study

The study uses both bivariable and multi-variable methods to establish an empirical link between dietary diversity of women and their participation in collectives such as SHGs, FPOs etc. and access to decisions regarding loans. Table 2 describes the indicators in detail.

Table 2. Construction of the Indicators

Indicator		Variable/Question	Indicator Construction
Key Outcome	Individual Dietary Diversity Score of Women (IDDSW)	Whether consumed from any of the listed food groups in the last 24 hours (Yes = 1 No=0); All yes aggregated across individuals to get IDDS	Inadequate (<5) = 0; Adequate (>5) = 1
Key predictors	Access to collectives	Member of at least one group (SHG/ FPO/CBO) present in community	Yes = 1 No = 0
	Access to credit and savings women	Self/jointly made at least one decision (investment/usage/closure) regarding at least one credit/savings source in the household	Yes = 1 No = 0
Socio-demographic attributes	Agrarian Region	Districts falling into Humid and Semi-Arid /Arid	Semi-arid/arid= 0; Humid= 1
	Social Group	Combined indicator of Religion (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Others) and cast (SC, ST, OBC and General)	Hindu Dalit (SC/ST) = 0; Hindu OBC =1; Any religion General = 2; Non-Hindu non-General = 3
	Land-size class	Households divided into 3 groups by Hectares of Land owned	Marginal (Up to 1 Ha) = 0; Small to semi-medium (1 to 4 Ha) = 1; Medium to Large (4 Ha and above) = 2
	Education level	Individuals divided into 4 groups by their completed education levels	Illiterate = 0; Primary (Can read/write & up to 5th) = 1 Middle (5th to 8th) = 2; Secondary and above (9th and above) = 4
	Asset level	Whether possess listed durable asset (Yes =1; No=0); Aggregated across assets to get a total score	Tertiles of Asset score (Low= 0; Middle = 1; High =2)
	Kitchen Garden	Whether possess separate plot for kitchen garden	Yes = 1; No =0
	Access to the PDS	Whether consumed from the PDS in last 6 months	Yes = 1; No = 0
	Average household Size	How many members in household	
	Average Hours of Leisure (Women)	How many hours (avg.) do you spend on self-care and leisure in 24 hours	Log of Hours

Source: By the authors

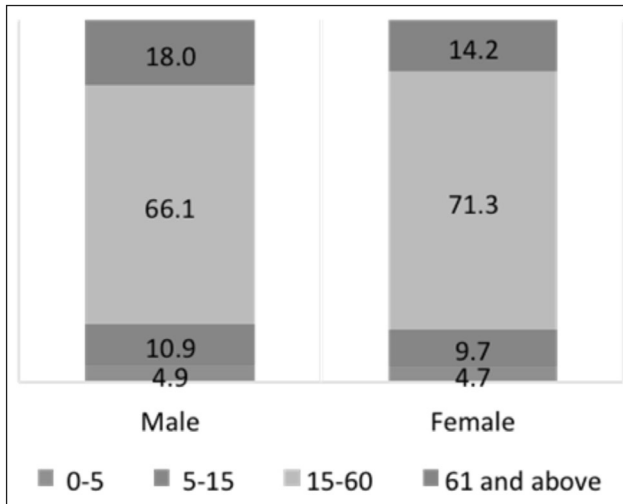
3. Analysis and Results

Univariate analysis was conducted for describing the sample attributes. For the bivariate and multivariate analysis only women’s data is used to explore the association of group membership with women’s dietary diversity. The multivariate logistic model used to measure the odds of women’s adequate dietary diversity score (IDDSW) is described below.

$$IDDS_{W} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Group Membership} \times \text{Dummy Humid Region} + \beta_2 \text{Loan and Savings Access} \times \text{Dummy Humid Region} + \beta_{3-n} (\text{Sociodemographic attributes})$$

Two-fifth of the adult sample were in the age group of 46-60, followed by 31 – 45 years, and around one fifth were in 61 and above. A small proportion of 7% were in the younger 16-30 age group.

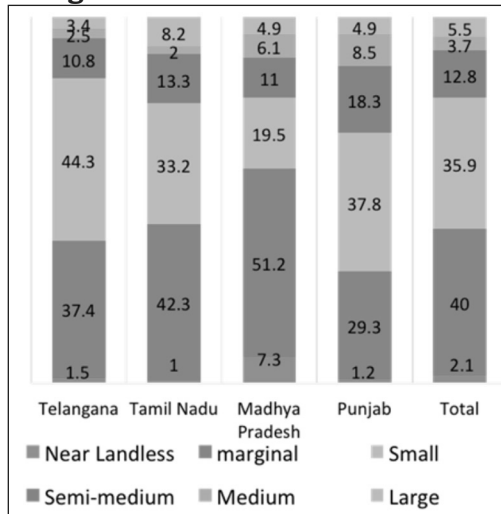
Figure 1. Age Distribution of all Individuals



Source: By authors using primary data.

As the sample was purposively agricultural households, the land-size distribution was heavier towards landed households of marginal and small category. Around 40% of the households belonged to marginal land-size class followed by 35% in small land size class category (Figure 2).

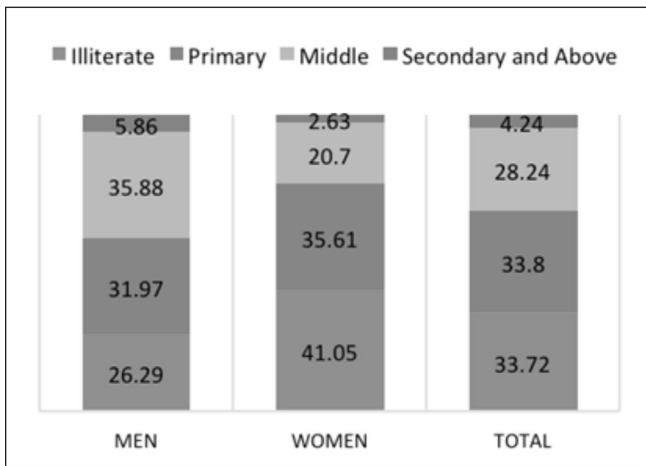
Figure 2. Land size distribution



Source: By authors using primary data.

The proportion of marginal farmers was highest in Madhya Pradesh followed by Tamil Nadu. Within Madhya Pradesh, Sidhi district had the highest proportion of small/marginal farmer households. The sampled households of Punjab showed more equitable distribution across land size class than any other states.

Figure 3. Education level of the Sample



Source: By authors using primary data

Among the primary members, majority of surveyed farmers (around three-fifths) reported that they were at least educated till primary level. In fact, the % of women with primary education was

higher than men by almost 4%. However, the same can also be result of clubbing “read” and “read and write without formal schooling” and “completed primary school” in the same category (Figure 3).

Table 3. Distribution of Adequate IDDS women by selected socio-demographic attributes

Covariates	Distribution (N = 573)	By IDDS_W Categories		
		Inadequate	Adequate	Total
Group Membership				
No	73.3	55.8	44.2	100
Yes	26.7	32.0	68.0	100
Access to Credit/Savings				
No	22.6	65.4	34.6	100
Yes	67.1	42.3	57.7	100
No response	10.3	61.0	39.0	100
Social group				
Hindu Dalit	9.6	27.3	72.7	100
Hindu OBC	61.1	49.9	50.1	100
All General	23.9	49.6	50.4	100
Minority Dalit	5.4	83.9	16.1	100
Land-class				
Marginal	42	49.4	50.6	100
Small to Semi medium	48.8	47.1	52.9	100
Medium to large	9.2	62.3	37.7	100
Education				
Illiterate	5.4	51.6	48.4	100
Primary	70.7	50.7	49.3	100
Middle	20.6	44.1	55.9	100
Sec and above	2.6	40.0	60.0	100
Asset Class				
Low	17.6	36.6	63.4	100
Medium	46.3	42.5	57.5	100
High	36.1	64.7	35.3	100
Kitchen Garden				
No	73.9	50.2	49.8	100
Yes	26.1	47.3	52.7	100
PDS				
No	16.7	81.3	18.8	100
yes	83.3	43.1	56.9	100
Region				
Semi-arid	50.5	48.3	51.7	100
Humid	49.5	50.7	49.3	100
Mean HH Size		4.2	3.5	3.9
Mean Leisure Hours/Day		9.8	10.8	10.4
Total	100	49.5	50.5	100

Source: By authors using primary data

The distribution of women with adequate IDDS by selected socio-demographic attributes revealed that women with group membership and access to loan and savings have a higher share of adequate IDDS women than their counterparts. Similarly, more women with kitchen garden and the PDS have better diet than those without. The average household size of adequate dietary score women is lower than their inadequate IDDS counterparts and the average hours of leisure a day is higher.

Within social groups, the Hindu Dalits show a very high proportion with dietary diversity, but their non-Hindu counterparts show an extremely low percentage of the same. Similarly, more proportion of women in landless households and asset-poor households seemed to eat better.

Table 4. Unadjusted and Adjusted Odds of Adequate IDDS in women

Predictors	OR	95% Conf. Interval		AOR	95% Conf. Interval	
		Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
Group Membership						
No				Reference		
Yes	2.225	1.479	3.347	3.786	1.352	10.601
Region						
Semi-arid				Reference		
Humid				0.778	0.307	1.974
Humid Region X Group membership						
Semi-arid & No				Reference		
Humid Region & Yes				0.195	0.061	0.630
Access to Credit/Savings						
No				Reference		
Yes	2.283	1.497	3.481	0.904	0.409	2.001
Humid Region X Loan Access						
Semi-arid & No				Reference		
Humid Region & Yes				1.884	0.668	5.315
HH Size				0.858	0.758	0.971
Leisure Hours (log)				5.879	2.368	14.598
Social group						
Hindu Dalit				Reference		
Hindu OBC				0.412	0.193	0.878
All General				0.600	0.249	1.447
Minority Dalit				0.070	0.017	0.285
Land-class						
Marginal				Reference		
Small to Semi medium				1.186	0.735	1.914
Medium to large				0.746	0.333	1.670
Education						

Illiterate				Reference		
Primary				0.687	0.247	1.904
Middle				0.996	0.335	2.961
Secondary and above				1.413	0.292	6.828
Asset Class						
Low				Reference		
Medium				1.057	0.590	1.892
High				0.403	0.211	0.769
Kitchen Garden						
No				Reference		
Yes				1.889	1.134	3.148
PDS						
No				Reference		
yes				4.610	2.186	9.722
Constant				0.027	0.002	0.359

Source: By authors using primary data

In an unadjusted model, both group membership and access to loan and savings show a significant effect on increasing the odds of women's adequate IDDS. But the adjusted model reveals a more complicated result. Adjusting for the socio-demographic attributes, it is observed that in the semi-arid regions, group membership has a very high positive effect on increasing the odds of adequate diet in women (AOR: 3.786). However, no such relation was observed with access to credit and savings.

The odds of adequate IDDS in women with group membership in humid regions was worked out by adding the coefficient of Humid region to the coefficient of the interaction term and taking the exponential of the same. It was observed that the odds were lower for group members in humid regions (0.736). In the socio-demographic attributes, kitchen garden and PDS show very high and significant odds of adequate IDDS compared to the women without kitchen garden and PDS. A smaller household size and higher leisure hour also increased the odds of adequate IDDS.

4. Conclusion

This study addresses the question of whether access to group membership in terms of leadership quality enhancement and access to loan and savings have a positive association with women's dietary diversity. There are several pieces of evidence showing a positive association between women's empowerment and nutritional outcome—but the exact pathway of such change remains debated (Bisgrove & Popkin, 1996; Malapit et.al., 2013; Gupta, Pingali, & Pinstrup-Andersen, 2019).

The results show that the leadership pathway i.e. active participation in groups such as SHG and FPOs show significant increase in diet quality, but the credit and savings pathway don't show a significant impact. Our result corroborates the findings that better leadership qualities also improve women's access to better diets (Sraboni et.al., 2014; Habib & Jubb, 2015; Malapit et.al., 2015). Geography or agrarian system also plays a role as the significant odds is observed in semi-arid or arid systems – which also produce more of non-staple variety (Sharma et.al., 1996). In the humid regions group members show a lower odd – which may also be due to the access issues.

We find a counterintuitive result with caste as Dalit Hindu women show a higher odd of adequate dietary diversity. While the intersection between caste, landlessness and asset-poor is high, it is observed in several studies that Dalit households eat a bigger range of food – including non-vegetarian items which are shunned by other castes (Natrajan & Jacob, 2018). However, a more nuanced study is needed to make a conclusion about the regional variations of these relations and the counterintuitive results which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Based on the study it may be recommended that leadership development of women – especially for the non-Hindu SC/ST women through active group-membership should be promoted especially in semiarid regions for better dietary outcomes.

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Reservation and Political Empowerment of Women in the Sphere of Local Self Government : West Bengal Scenario

Reservation of seats for women and others belonging to the SC/STs at lower level of governance (Panchayats and Municipalities) led to a new dawn for women of India recognising their role in community as well as in governance. The present article, based on primary data analyses how far reservations have augmented political empowerment of women in local self governments of West Bengal. The study concludes that though in spite of all odds and hardships women members have participated in the community work, which was out of their reach for so long, and their attitudes towards life have been changed, still there are so many "ifs and buts" to make the dream come true.

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1.1 Introduction

Though the Constitution of India speaks about equal rights for both sexes, and entitles women to enjoy economic, social, cultural and political rights on an equal footing with men (Article 325) ; though it considers the appropriate use of legislation to redress inequality and prevent the further infringement of women's fundamental democratic freedoms and human rights ; though under Article 15 (3), the State is thereby empowered to make "special provisions", legislative or otherwise, to secure women's socio-political advancement , but still today in India there exists the sufferings , myriad forms of distress and discriminations of women who possess half the sky - as children, they are discriminated in terms of access to food, health, education - as adults they have no voice and choice regarding livelihood, wages , social status and suffering from physical abuse and rape. Because still today India has been carrying on the patriarchal set-up characterized by subjugation of females and turns its back to "the need to restore what is rightfully theirs but is unjustly denied to them" (Anand, 2010).

In this perspective, the Reservation of seats for women and others belonging to the SC/STs (Article 243D) at lower level of governance (Panchayats and Municipalities) led to a new dawn for women of India recognising their role in community as well as in governance. The Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992 sets out in detail, in Article 243D, the manner in which reservations are to be provided to women and others belonging to the SC/STs. At the same time it is also worth mentioning that the Women's Reservation Bill [The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2008] proposing to provide thirty three per cent of all seats reserved for women in the Lower house of Parliament of India , the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies , has not yet been passed by the Parliament over a decade and more. Though the women were permitted to enter into local self-government but are not allowed in the top corridor of power.

1.2 West Bengal Panchayat Act

However, this reservation policy was also incorporated in the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 through Section 4 , 94 & 140, inserted in the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 1992 (West Ben. Act XVII of 1992) confirming seat reservation for SC & ST at each tier of Panchayats out of which one third for women and out of total seats, minimum one third seats reserved for Women. And Section 4,98 & 143 inserted in the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 1994 (West Ben. Act XVIII of 1994 and the West Bengal Panchayat

(Amendment) Act , 1997 (West Ben. Act XV of 1997) states that not less than one-third of the total number of office bearers at each tier of Panchayats including the offices reserved for SC and ST shall be reserved for the Women and it would be determined by rotation.

As a result, a wave of women representation came into the panchayat sphere which has been depicted in table 1.

Table 1: Women Representation

Year	Seat Reservation for women	Seats occupied by women
1993 (4th Election)	33%	36.%
1998 (5th Election)	33%	35%
2003 (6th Election)	33%	35.4% (7 All women GPs)
2008 (7th Election)	33%	39.32% (5 All women GPs)
2013 (8th Election)	50%	50%
2018 (9th Election)	50%	50%

Source: Information of West Bengal Panchayat, P&RD Deptt.,2018

1.3 Our Quest

Though the women’s participation in governance is an indicator of women empowerment, but the questions are that

- What is the status of women’s political participation?
- What is the impact of the reservation?
- Can reservation be seen as a catalyst for emerging women leaders?

To get the answers of above questions, B.R.Ambedkar Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development, West Bengal conducted several studies on “Women in Panchayats” covering elected women representatives of Panchayat Boards during (2003-08), (2008-13), (2013-18) and the same for the period (2018- 23) is going on. This paper reveals few findings of these studies.

We can start answering from the first question. From secondary data, we can say that out of the 26,00,000 panchayat representatives of India , 9,75,000 are women and 8,50,000 of them are from the scheduled castes and tribes (SC/STs). In West Bengal in sixth panchayat (2003-2008) out of 58,869 members 20,654 were women fulfilling 35% seats, in seventh election (2008-2013) , occupancy of seats by women is more than 38% and in eighth (2013-18) and ninth (2018-2013) election 50% seats are captured by women. Though this record is far behind the record of Bihar(54%). Bihar fixed the reservation at the figure to 50% in 2006. In 2008, Sikkim, also followed the same way increasing its reservation for women to 40%. Chhattisgarh, Madhya

Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand have also passed laws increasing the reservation for women in panchayats to 50% in 2010. West Bengal announced 50% Reservation of women seats in 2013. As a result, reservations have brought political and social exposure to women from among the SC, ST, OBC, from the backward, from poor, and from the illiterate. This is a great breakthrough for the rural women as their community -role has never been accepted by the society rather their productive and reproductive role. But this data does not imply that women have entered into politics truly. Rather they have entered into the panchayat system being planted by the political party. This has been found from our study.

In order to understand the political and ideological background of our women representatives which is a complementary factor with social background, we put some questions before the actors of the field. In our study it has been seen that most of the women representatives were brought under party politics particularly in time of Panchayat election. Our experiences clearly indicate that the majority of the women members contested in the election in 1998 , 2003 , 2013 and 2018 due to the reservation of seats, which were represented previously either by their husbands or fathers –in-law or brothers or any male family members (Ganguly, Banerjee, 2012). 55.38% women members contested the election in 2003 without any political experience. 62% women representatives came in 2008 without any political exposures and 78% women in 2013 were brought without any political knowledge. Majority of the male members (71.21% in 2003, 75% in 2008 and 82% in 2013) who are politically sound and experienced, have familiarity with panchayats, though one-fourth of the respondents were with low political experience. Experienced members are less in the female category rather than male.

The Panchayati Raj leadership was characterized by an overwhelming dominance enjoyed by the CPI(M) and other left parties till 2008 (Dasgupta, 2020).

But the Board of (2008-2013) was of mixed character - grassroot level was dominated by Trinamool Congress (TMC); middle level was shared by TMC , INC , CPI(M) and other left parties and upper tier was dominated solely by the CPI(M) in 16 districts and by TMC in 2 districts. But Panchayati Raj leadership in 2013 and 2018 have been solely captured by TMC.

1.4 Findings

All of our surveys indicate that younger women have come to bear the risk and responsibility of panchayats instead of older women, though they are coming due to reservation at the earlier age without any experience and exposure. They also are lacking Education due to

which their performances are not upto the mark. There is lower caste representation in panchayat among female members. Though the minority representation varies from district to district, overall Hindu dominance is there.

Most of the women members are both socially and economically impoverished, they are to live their life in a state of utter penury. Problems are even more acute if we take a look at the tea-garden based GPs, or drought-prone GPs of Purulia or remotest GPs at the border area of Uttar Dinajpur where the minimum standard of decent living are conspicuous by their absence. Consequently women have to bear the hardship. For example in Lankapara of Jalpaiguri, or in village Bahara of Murshidabad or in Majhidih or Purulia, women have to traverse a long distance to fetch drinking water. They have to come to the GP office after serving for all the members of her family. Most of them are housewives and financially dependent on the male and hence prey of their whims. We have found that majority women members of (2003-08) and (2008-13) Boards belong to lower income groups whereas that of (2013-18) and (2018-23) Boards are from well-to-do families.

In spite of all odds and hardships women members have participated in the community work, which was out of their reach so long, and their attitudes towards the life have been changed. This is by and large quite inspiring, barring a few exceptions. Though very often “system of reservation” is blamed as “Proxy system”, because behind each and every women representative there is a “Godfather”, a male counterpart who has planted her but still this women touch in governance has brought panchayats nearer to the people especially to women. However, the political inexperience of the women is not so important rather than the socially positive effect of their participation has an impact on women at large. This is a great impact of reservation.

Works other than Schemes done by the Women for the Women

- Awareness generation and combating against early marriage
- Awareness generation and taking actions against child labour
- Awareness generation and combating against child abuse
- Advocacy for Child protection
- Campaign against dowry
- Awareness generation and taking actions against Alcohol
- Bringing the girl child in school.
- Breaking the Wine-shops.
- Working against girl-trafficking
- Health Camp

- Birth control and family planning camp
- Handicapped camp
- Arranging school sports
- Conservation of Ecosystem
- Eye-camp
- Nutrition-camp
- Plantation
- Health Service
- Legal aids
- SHG formation

It is a well known fact that women are coming to the governance due to the positive discrimination of Constitutional Amendment of 1993. But it is also true that this reservation of constituencies for women is done by rotational method. As such, a woman constituency in a given year gets deserved in the next election year. As a result, a female member of one Board may not appear in the next election unless her party gives a chance to extend her political career. Though she has every right to contest against a general seat, it is a general phenomenon in this gendered society that women are practically barred from the political fights in the general constituencies which is denoted as “an instance of marginalization” (Kaushik,1999).

In a male dominated society, reservation is an opportunity for the subordinate sex. Thus their presence is more important whatever be their background. As a result of their stepping at development sector, during last four panchayat elections, changes have been seen-

- Total Fertility rate has been decreased by 22.7 % (with total fertility rate 1.6 lesser than national average at 2.2)
- Birth Registration rate has been increased 59.45% (57.7% in 2003 and 92% in 2018)
- Death rate has been decreased by 15.71 % (death rate 5.9 in 2015, 7.0 in 2001)
- Infant mortality rate has been decreased by 60.31 % (63 in 2001 , 25 in 2017)
- Maternal mortality rate has been declined by 28.37% (141 in 2004 ,101 in 2018)
- Institutional Delivery increased to 97.5% in 2018-19.
- Sex ratio has been increased to 947 (2011) from 934 (2001)
- Average age of marriage in rural areas has been increased to 19.6 from 14.

- Literacy rate has been increased by 11.10% (68.64 in 2001 and 76.26 in 2011)
- Female Literacy has been increased by 19.28% (59.14 in 2001 and 70.54 in 2011)
- Flow of information has been spread among the general women.
- There has been emergence of SHG as a grassroot level organisation, especially for poor women.

Source: The Census , 2001,2011 / Family Planning Association of India Reports, 2017-18 / SRS, 2018 /NFHS-3, 2005-06/ NFHS-4, 2014-15.

Now the last question is to be answered that can reservation be seen as a catalyst for emerging women leaders? What do we mean by the word “leader” ? Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right (Bennis et al. 1985). In this context of leadership, we have seen that very few women members themselves have been managing Gram Panchayat or Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Parishad very aptly, but a good percentage of women are serving very well for the community through pro-poor service delivery without knowing any institutional agendas. In this respect members of seven all women Gram Panchayats of sixth panchayat, 2003-08 (Karisunda of Bankura, Kultikri, Andhari, Benachapra, Jogardanga & Jenkapur of Paschim Medinipur, Shyamnagar of Hooghly) and four all women Gram Panchayats of seventh panchayat, 2008 (Koor of Burdwan district and Kultikri, Nalbona & Amlagora of Paschim Medinipur) etc. are notable leaders.

Sanitation Programme covering the district by Sabhadhipati of Jalpaiguri (2003), Initiatives for pipeline water by member of Lankapara GP of Jalpaiguri district(2003), Initiatives for Mahila Sabha taken by Pradhan of Moynapur Gram Panchayat of Bankura district (2008), Pradhan of Belbari-II of Dakshin Dinajpur district (2008), Initiatives for Women Police Station and Women University and one Mahasangha, called Sundarini (5000 women from Sundarban earning their bread through this) taken by Sabhadhipati of South 24 Parganas (2008,2013 & 2018), Economic development through Tissue culture, Horticulture , Vermi compost culture etc., Preparing Burning ghat, excavating 100 ponds per sansad for sweet water etc. and Own Fund generation by Pradhan of Namkhana GP (2013), systematizing and regular monitoring of Rural Hospital (Block Primary Health Centre), SLWM (Solid Liquid Waste Management) etc. by Sabhapati of Bhagabanpur II (2003,2008,2013 & 2018), Motivating women to form Self Help Groups for earning bread by Sabhapati of Lalgola (2008 & 2013), SLWM (Solid Liquid Waste Management) and Recycling wastes etc. by Sabhapati, Domjur, Howrah district (2013), Initiatives for combating Covid and managing the problem of migrant labour by

Pradhan of Pratapaditya Nagar GP, South 24 Parganas etc. are worth-mentioning leaders.

It has been found that women who are successful in performing their role, are “developed” or “advanced” as said earlier. Either they have quality education or from a well-to-do family, or have their own income or from the family of political culture etc. But they are weak in context of “empowerment”. They have neither access nor control in decision making in spite of their own strengths of education, money or political establishment. This is mainly due to the political intervention and political whip. Someone may have the access in decision making but has no control over it. They are made understand that they have nothing to say but to obey and carry out the duties, which are handed over to them. In this perspective we can say that socio-economic status is no doubt a significant factor towards discharging the responsibilities in panchayats but it is not sufficient to take effective part in decision making. Thus to get an emerging women leaders, not only the socio-economic factors are to be solid but also for functioning in a political body, political facilitation is important.

1.5 Policy Prescriptions and Conclusions

It is very much felt from our studies that failure of women representatives of different political parties in performing effectively in panchayats is due to lack of care of political parties. Primarily it is the duty of the party to train the candidates according to the chair. But it has been spelt by the majority that the party does not take initiative to guide them learning either the theoretical part or the implementing part of their “Role”. Rather they are very much interested in bossing. Representatives of each party are more loyal to the party rather than the officials. Thus their expectation is more from the party than the administration. Members of some GPs, those who are getting the guidance of the party (though there is too much intervention) are better performers than the others.

Not only the guidance of the party, another issue like party interference or the liberty of the functionary should be least so that subordinate sex can learn through trial and error method. It has been found that some of the women have quality education, political grooming, experience and exposure, an insight within and also courage. But they can not perceive their role due to political mess and political intervention as an excuse for discipline by the Party. Independent initiatives of the elected women representatives have been discarded by the Party. Nullifying the prayer for the tubewell repairing worth of Rs. 100/- by the Pradhan of shyambazar of Hooghly or choosing the widow beneficiaries for widow – pension without

consulting the party by pradhan of Andhari of Paschim Medinipur, or rejecting the prayer for Janani Suraksha Yojana of mothers below age 18, by the pradhan of Niallishpara-Goaljan of Murshidabad, or inspecting the works of NREGA herself by the pradhan of Nizampur-II GP of Uttar Dinajpur etc are the good example of leadership qualities which have been opposed by the parties.

There are also other issues that need to be looked at if reservation for women is to be effective. These parameters are administrative support from the official functionaries or any other support (training support, knowledge support, consultancy etc.) for capacity building and monitoring the work of the members. These are contributory factors in execution of entrusted roles and responsibilities of members. In gram panchayats, like Kultikri, sanitation programmes were highly promoted by official functionaries and thus the GP got the "Nirmal Gram" award. Block development officer of Bhagwangola panchayat samiti, has rendered full support to the pradhan and other members of Bhagwangola-I gram panchayat to implement the "Safai Abhiyan" and to recruit 9 safai-karmis for this programme. Pradhan has been successful in execution of this programme. Likewise, pradhan and upa-pradhan of Hanumanthnagar GP, of Bhagwangola block of Murshidabad district have been successful in opening a delivery room at gram panchayat office with the support of official functionaries of panchayat samiti. Apart from this women also need training support, knowledge support, skill support to be effective as panchayat leader. Federation of women organisations of all the political parties at the GP level, PS level and ZP level should be initiated for the sake of the women functionaries; it would be helpful for women representatives to interact on any issues or for getting solutions.

Apart from administrative support, support of the community and from the family are very vital issues for emerging leadership. For this regular community meeting special Mahila Sansad has been initiated in West Bengal since May, 2010. Along with this another issue has emerged from our study that by rotation once a reserved seat has been declared as general seat in the next election, the woman candidate has been discarded to contest against the general seat though she has credibility. The male counterparts think that women are only for reserved seats. Their scope has been curtailed as one-third. As a result so many blossoming women leaders crashed. Thus there is a need to modify the system of rotating seats reserved for women so that they can get scope for 10 to 15 years of continued opportunity and can prove themselves. Reservation has been continuing in the Panchayat system for the last 27 years as a symbol of modernity and perfect democracy. But it has not been felt by the fairer sex that reservation is necessary condition for women empowerment but not sufficient. There are so many 'ifs and buts' to make the dream come true.

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Sexual Harassment: Perspectives and Policy

The novel corona virus brought in its wake not just health problems but also lot of socio-economic issues as well. The women and the less privileged in terms of gender, class and caste as usual seems to be the worst affected. Despite all the legislation that has been enacted in the international world as well as by the Indian legislature, the basic human right of the woman and other genders to be alive, breathe the same air without being violated, and enjoy the same benefits as every other citizen, is not only understood but blatantly ignored by a large majority of citizens. Without any concern for their dignity, women and girls have continued to be blatantly harassed in both public and private spaces, merely on account of their sex. It is essential to create more safe and women friendly living spaces. Kerala, with its various grass roots initiatives and local level administrative possibilities, could become a model in women's safety as well. Introduction.

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1. Introduction

The novel corona virus brought in its wake not just health problems but a whole lot of socio-economic issues as well. The widespread impact on our social life and its possible long term consequences are only being studied and are still not understood fully. However, women and the less privileged in terms of gender, class and caste as usual seem to be the worst affected.

For instance, a recent event that was highlighted in the news caught my attention. Reports said that on September 6th, 2020, a Covid 19 patient who was being transported by an ambulance from one hospital to another, was violated and sexually abused by the ambulance driver. The woman eventually informed the authorities and the abuser was apprehended. What is interesting is that the abuser had criminal records and nevertheless confessed his crime. While confessing, he also apologised for his crime and expected to be let off easily with a warning. The point here being that he had not really understood the gravity of his crime, and looked upon it as a mere transgression, and not as a serious offense. The crime could have been prevented if pre-emptive measures had been resorted to. It was a premeditated and well planned crime, wherein the driver of the ambulance, the offender, even managed to change his given route to facilitate the felony. Of course, the administration swung into action to put in place a series of rules to prevent such crimes from taking place in future. But the fact remains that there are a large number of criminals at large in society whose crimes are casually supported by the apathy of an ignorant system. This is where the need for counselling and awareness raising becomes important. The need to make not just him, but a large number of people in our society, aware that such crimes are grievous and not a mere “mistake”, is the current requirement. And if it could have been done before the crime was committed it would have saved the trauma and suffering of the unfortunate patient. It is also shocking that this incident took place in a state like Kerala, which lays claims to high levels of education and literacy. So clearly there is a problem with the system of education as well, which simply doesn't educate a person to understand or respect the right of another individual, to live and travel freely in safety, albeit belonging to another sex.

2. Legislation on Human Rights

Despite all the legislation that has been enacted in the international world as well as by the Indian legislature, the basic human right of the woman and other genders to be alive, breathe the

same air without being violated, and enjoy the same benefits as every other citizen, is not only not understood but blatantly ignored by a large majority of citizens. Why is this so?

Is there a culture of silence when it comes to discussing gender, or sex or even issues specific to women, and other genders? Are they not legal citizens of India? Do not the rights specifically mentioned in the Constitution of India apply to them?

Let us take a look at the legal situation here. In this regard, what does the Constitution of India have to say?

According to the Constitution of India, there are provisions for the non-discrimination of a person on the basis of gender. The Fundamental Rights very clearly specify the following

Article 14: Equality before the law

Article 15: Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth

Article 19 (1) (g): Right to practice one's profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business

Article 21: Right to life and personal liberty

Nevertheless, the human rights of women and girls have not been given the primacy and importance they should have been. Without any concern for their dignity, women and girls have continued to be blatantly harassed in both public and private spaces, merely on account of their sex. The importance of safety and security of women and girls in India was still not properly understood by the state authorities. Gender based violence manifests in lesser recognised forms such as forms of sexual harassment. Very often the offenders get away with these crimes as they are taken lightly. "Eve teasing" was the term popularly used for sexual harassment.

3. Sexual Harassment

Let us look at how sexual harassment can be defined. Sexual harassment is a universal problem. There are many ways in which this term has been interpreted in different parts of the world. It was the United Nations that took one of the earliest steps to identify, name and define the problem. Taking into account the magnitude of the problem, its universality and its socio-economic costs this deviant behaviour can effect, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979

In the General Recommendation 19 of CEDAW, sexual harassment has been defined as including "such unwelcome sexually determined behavior as physical contact and advances, sexually

colored remarks, showing pornography and sexual demands, whether by words or actions”. This makes it clear that sexual harassment is not merely physical but has so many other dimensions to it. Such as the verbal, emotional, economic, financial, psychological social and other aspects.

The International Labour Office in its Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, adopted in 1998, at the 86th International Labour Conference makes it clear that all rights are universal. The Declaration defines sexual harassment as “sex-based behaviour that is unwelcome and offensive to its recipient”.

Some of the major behaviour which qualifies as sexual harassment have been described in this document. These are

- a. PHYSICAL -Physical violence, touching, unnecessary close proximity
- b. VERBAL- Comments and questions about appearance, life-style, sexual orientation, offensive phone calls
- c. NON -VERBAL -Whistling, sexually-suggestive gestures, display of sexual materials

But these constitute only a minor suggestion of what could be classified as sexual harassment. They could be expanded to include leering and staring, displaying rude and offensive material with the intent to disturb, making sexual gestures or suggestive body movements, flashing, cracking sexual jokes and comments, insulting by making sexual comments or making an obscene phone call, or sexual assault.

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women defined sexual harassment broadly, as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”

It is also clear that sexual harassment affects not only women and girls, but also men and person of other genders and sexual preferences. It is a method of domination, wherein the more powerful employ harassment to denigrate or suppress the less powerful. As per this power structure, women and children and people belonging to other genders are often found in the lower hierarchies and fall victim to the power play.

In 1997, sexual harassment was legally defined in India, as per the Visaka guidelines . Previously referred to as “Eve teasing”, sexual harassment was defined by the court judgment as a violation of women’s human rights. The seriousness of the crime was thus highlighted and steps outlined to identify its various forms. The judgment also charted out guidelines for its prevention and redressal.

According to these guidelines, Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour(whether directly or by implication) as:

- a) physical contact and advances
- b) a demand or request for sexual favours
- c) sexually coloured remarks
- d) showing pornography
- e) any other unwelcome physical verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

This was the first time that the right to dignity of women and girls, as individuals was recognized in legal terms in India and the Visaka-vs-State of Rajasthan case was hailed as a landmark in the history of women’s freedom in India and the subcontinent.

Despite all these legislations, the idea of gender justice had not really reached the popular imagination and women’s freedom and women’s rights continued to be violated in both the public and private spheres. It was only after, the gruesome Nirbaya rape and the huge public outcry consequent to it, that the need for action against such brutal crime came to be recognised by the government agencies and the administration. The spontaneous mass protest and indignant reactions of the protesters drew response as it was able to shake public apathy and raise awareness on the consequences of unchecked male chauvinism and gender stereotyping. If an “ordinary” woman could be tortured and torn up in the heart of India’s capital city, despite the presence of a male escort, it was understood that no woman was safe from improper sexual advances. Public outcry resulted and women men and other genders demanded safety from these sexual predators.

4. Major Amendments and formulation of new Acts

Taking into account the explosive social environment, and the felt need for immediate action, the existing laws were amended and consequently tougher anti-rape legislation came into force. In the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, more offences like, acid attack, sexual harassment, voyeurism, stalking have been incorporated into the Indian Penal Code. Police action has been made mandatory when crimes against women are reported.

Another Act was formulated to support the safety of women in their workplace. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 seeks to provide a safe and secure environment to women at the workplace. The Act covers all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protects them against sexual harassment in all workplaces, both in public and private sector, whether organized or unorganized. Domestic workers are also covered by this law. The law provides for a mechanism in the form of Internal and Local Complaints Committee to provide redress in cases of sexual harassment. It also casts a duty on employers to sensitize employees by carrying out various awareness generation programmes and workshops. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

Other legislations to prevent the undue exploitation of women by sexual exploitation include the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986 (amended in 2013), Protection of Women from Domestic Violence, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.

Notwithstanding the enactment of laws, crimes against women have been increasing in India. Everyday new and newer and more horrifying forms of violence against women are reported along with the earlier known forms of violence. This calls for urgent action at both the policy level as well as the grassroots level.

Aside from these, there, there is now the new category of cybercrime. This type of sexual harassment, has of late reached unimaginably dangerous proportions, with cyber stalking, financial frauds, identity theft and cyber bullying, trolling, online grooming, privacy infringement, bullying, pornography, sexual defamation, morphing, and spoofing joining the long list of crimes. Use of obscene pictures and dirty language, the presence of confidence tricksters and frauds on the social media, making women and children soft targets are some of the methods of harassment. Everyday newer and newer forms of crime are being invented. Such is the danger that lurks in the cyber world.

As mentioned earlier, Kerala, the southern-most state of India, has often been lauded as a State which is woman-friendly as supported by its statistics relating to women's health and sex ratio. But in spite of being in the forefront of developmental economics and health issues, it is seen that the state has recorded a gradual rise in crimes against women which is growing to alarming proportions. During the lockdown, there has been no abatement of crimes against women as per the studies conducted.

Preventive action, it may be seen has become an urgent requirement if we are to uphold the constitutional freedoms. There

have been studies which have looked at factors that make our public spaces unsafe for women. Given the current context, it may be a good idea to draw from their conclusions and recommendations and extend and utilise them for our current felt need of safety for all.

5. Various studies and recommendations

In a study conducted in 2009-11 in two cities in Kerala by Sakhi, Jagori, and Anweshi in collaboration with UN Women, many of the city spaces were found unsafe for women. The recommendations made by them could be applied on both urban and rural spaces elsewhere in Kerala. The study was conducted in two of the cities of Kerala considered to be the most dangerous for women at the time of the study with relation to the reporting of crimes.

After a detailed study and several consultations, they produced a report including the following recommendations for creating a safe environment in the cities for women. These include suggestions such as

- having visible presence of police personnel in lonely areas
- camera surveillance or police surveillance at bus shelters
- proper lighting of public spaces
- maintenance of clean and well lit, safe toilets
- women friendly police and other officials
- women-friendly spaces in all cities
- more publicity for helpline numbers
- more gender awareness programmes
- pre-paid autorikshaws and taxis
- special help booths adjacent to bus shelters
- safe short stay hostels for women

These suggestions could very easily be included in public and policy planning to create a safe and secure environment for women and girls in both rural and urban spaces.

The ILO declaration has also calculated the costs of sexual harassment and the loss it causes to the victims, the employers as well as society as a whole if effective action is not taken urgently. This includes the following:

For VICTIMS- Psychological suffering including humiliation, reduced motivation, loss of self-esteem; Behavioural change including isolation, deterioration of relationships; Stress-related physical and mental illness including drugs and alcohol abuse; Victims foregoing career opportunities, leaving employment or committing suicide;

For EMPLOYERS- Decreased enterprise productivity, due to impaired judgment, compromised teamwork, de-motivation,

absenteeism. No applicants will fill vacancies at workplace where they fear sexual harassment. Progress and innovation within the enterprise are hindered when the environment is deficient in trust and team spirit.

For SOCIETY- Long-term rehabilitation costs for the reintegration of victims, unemployment welfare benefits and retraining, invalidity costs for those with impaired working capacities, legal and criminal justice expenses, women's undermined access to high-status and well-paid jobs, traditionally male-dominated.

According to the UN statistics, more than one in three women worldwide, experience or have experienced, domestic violence and the occurrence of sexual harassment is far worse. Taking into account the fact that only a small percentage of these crimes are reported and recorded, the urgent need to take action has to be understood. And instead of solely taking action after the event, let us catch the criminal before he becomes too aggressive. Sexual harassment in its minor forms is as damaging as the more severe ones of rape and murder. By taking action against these forms of sexual harassment instead of turning a blind eye to it, would help greatly in reducing the crime rate. Let us create more safe and women friendly living spaces. Kerala, with its various grass roots initiatives and local level administrative possibilities, could become a model in women's safety as well.

6. Conclusion

These are indeed difficult times for all of us, but there are always ways and means to look ahead and move forward. As the poet said, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" We have to recognise that sexual harassment, in any form, mild or lethal, is a dangerous criminal act, just like any other form of violence against any fellow human being. It is up to the society to understand this factor and take initiatives to prevent it. From implementing legislations, to strong action from the upholders of law like the police, supported by local level bodies, peoples cooperatives, and non-governmental organisations right up to the judiciary—every level of society has to be involved actively in the process. When policy initiatives are supported by local level bodies, there is so much possibility to ensure a gender just state.

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Triggering of Domestic Violence in Times of Pandemic Curbs: A Case from Kerala

Global evidence shows that sexual and gender-based violence exacerbates during and after disasters due to prevailing gender inequalities. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, recent data and studies from both international and grassroot level indicates that there is growing incidence of violence against women with multiple impacts on women's wellbeing, their sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and ability to participate and lead in the recovery of our societies and economy. The present article based on post COVID-19 pandemic studies and reports from the frontlines from Kerala reveal that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence has intensified and it recommends the need of collective efforts to break the roots of this shadow pandemic.

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1. Introduction

Natural disasters disrupt the life of numerous people every year as it affects their physical and psychological wellbeing as well as upends economies and social structures. Climate change intensifies and accelerates an increased risk for future natural disasters. However, the differentiated impacts of the disaster are experienced differently by women, girls, boys, and men; and they use distinct coping mechanisms in response. Traditional gender roles have a tremendous bearing on women during the disaster. This can include the duties women and girls carry out, the clothing they wear, the way they expected to behave, etc. Global evidence shows that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) exacerbates during and after disasters due to gender inequalities and power imbalances in access to resources and relevant information.

The terms Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is often used interchangeably and must be understood in the context of structural inequalities between men and women. The first article of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993, defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence against women that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private spaces” . It further explains in article two that violence against women should also include beating, marital rape as well as other types of rape, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment intimidation at workplaces or educational institutions and prostitution. IPV refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship. SGBV is usually defined as violence or threat of violence against a person or group because of their gender or how they define themselves. All these evolve as manifestations of gender inequalities, violating basic human rights and of their exercise of fundamental freedom. It has also been acknowledged as a major public health issue. The World Health Organisation (WHO) also explains that gender-based violence can include: rape and attempted rape, marital rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, forced early marriage, domestic violence, trafficking and female genital mutilation . Ranging from immediate to long-term impacts, it accounts for death, disability and multiple physical, sexual and mental consequences for women, girls and also their families than, cancer, malaria, traffic injuries or war put together . Moreover, violence brings tremendous costs, from greater health care and legal expenses and losses in productivity, impacting national budgets and overall development.

Various theories have been proposed for understanding violence. Feminist analysis of violence has been based on power relations between men and women that deny women equal access to power and resources thus making them more vulnerable to violence from men. The cause of this violence can be traced to patriarchy – the ideology that bestows on men power and authority over all aspects of women’s lives including their bodies. This is manifested in various forms, perpetuated and validated by all social institutions. However, it has been realised that no single theory is adequate to explain violent behaviour among individuals. According to Ahuja (1998) and Sharma (1997) a common approach in some of the theories has been to focus on individual aggressors. There are two kinds of explanations focusing on individuals. One includes psycho-pathological and the other on the socio-psychological model. Other explanations give more importance to socio-structural factors as causes of violence among individuals. These include possible sources of stress and inert-individual conflict because of factors such as poor economic conditions, bad housing, poverty, lack of job opportunities, unfavourable and frustrating work conditions and other conditions arising out of inequalities in the society and unequal distribution of resources. Structural explanations also offer more political explanations of violent behaviour among individuals. Ahuja proposes an integrated model that includes a combination of the above factors and Heise (1998) proposes a clearer and interrelated ecological framework for understanding violent behaviour among individuals .

COVID-19 has imposed mandatory lockdowns in many countries including India. As governments insist their citizens to “stay at home”, as a unit of production, home is emerging as a single institution that is taking care of multiple needs and has become a place to reiterate power manifestation, the feminization of unpaid labour, violence and reproduction of patriarchy in almost all countries . Pre-COVID data shows that a third of women around the world experienced some form of violence in their lives. Last year, 243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) across the world have been subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, this number is likely to grow with multiple impacts on women’s wellbeing, their sexual and reproductive health, mental health, and ability to participate and lead in the recovery of our societies and economy. The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pointed out that “violence is not confined to the battlefield, and that for many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes”. Echoing the UN Chief’s message, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka, of UN Women stated “lockdown is a protective measure, but sees another deadly danger of a growing shadow pandemic, of violence against women. This dark feature of this pandemic is a mirror and a challenge to our values, our resilience and shared humanity”.

Violence against women in India is underpinned by the persistence of patriarchal social norms and inter- and intragender hierarchies that expose many to a continuum of violence throughout the life cycle, commonly referred to as existing “from the womb to the tomb”. Women are discriminated against and subordinated not only on the basis of sex, but on other grounds, such as caste, class, ability, sexual orientation, tradition and other realities. The manifestations of violence against women are a reflection of the structural and institutional inequality that is a reality for most women in India . India’s National Family Health Survey (2017) reveals that close to forty-two per cent men justify hitting or beating his wife, thirty-three per cent of married women have experienced physical (30%), sexual (7%), or emotional spousal violence (14%) and only 14 per cent of women have sought help to stop the violence. The problem is women and girls accept violence and treat it as a part and parcel of their lives due to the patriarchal setup. Subsequent to the lockdown, as complaints surged, the National Commission for Women (NCW) announced a WhatsApp number to receive complaints, however, with almost fifty seven per cent of the women in India not having access to phones, their options for registering complaints under the lockdown were limited. In 25 days between March 23 and April 16, the NCW received 239 complaints mainly through email and the dedicated WhatsApp number. This is almost double the number of complaints (123) received during the previous 25 days, from February 27 to March 22 . Of late, it is reported that during the first four phases of the lockdown, Indian women filed more domestic violence complaints than recorded in the last 10 years . It could be the tip of the iceberg, as women from the underprivileged communities have no means to reach out. The effectiveness of measures and initiatives to address the issue will depend on coherence and coordination associated with the design and implementation by conceptualising domestic violence-related services as part of essential services. Therefore, it is high time the government takes serious steps to ‘break the silence of violence’ against women which is both a consequence and a cause of gender inequality.

Contrary to the high social development including high educational level, Kerala the southernmost state in India is among the top ten states in terms of crime against women . Under these circumstances, using online application JotForm, KILA conducted a rapid study based on the information collected during the period between 23rd March to 18th April 2020 to evaluate the rates of domestic abuse, the nature of abuse and the apparent reasons for these subsequent to the lockdown. Data was collected from various helplines (which are the prevalent systems managing instances of domestic violence in the state functioning under the various government departments namely Mitra, Sakhi, Bhoomika, Snehitha and Mahila Samakhya), women

activists, experts and community woman facilitators working in Local Self-Governments.

Since it was intended to be a quick study, the questionnaire sent to the different helplines functioning in all 14 districts was such that, it enquired only the nature of complaints, the actions taken, the age of the complainants, their socio-economic background, and what are the specific circumstances if any. Information was also collected from community woman facilitators working as part of Local Self-Governments. Being a quick study, there was significant limitation in getting details from all the districts pertaining to all the questions. There are also chances of duplication and overlap since the information has been collected from various sources. Moreover, one person might have reported more than one type of abuse.

The study is of the 188 cases/complaints reported under the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act between 23.03.2020 and 18.04.2020 from Bhoomika, Mitra and Sakhi One Stop Centre (OSC). Seventy-six per cent were direct complaints made by the survivors. The data was classified based on the four major types of violence namely physical, mental, sexual or financial. Fifty-four per cent reported physical abuse, forty-two per cent mental abuse and two per cent sexual abuse. Previous studies have indicated that, since marital rape or sexual abuse within marriage is not considered a crime in the present situation, women do not seem to be ready to consider and report sexual violence as a type of violence inflicted upon them.

Women from socially and economically vulnerable sections deserve special consideration. Sujatha (2014) points out that the Dalit women were subordinated in terms of power relations to men, both in terms of patriarchy and caste hierarchy. The everyday discrimination is further marked by mental, emotional and physical violence by their spouses and other family members". From the information's available, the study tried to classify the cases based on their economic and social status. Based on the information received, the majority of the complainants (63%) came from middle-class category and thirty per cent from the lower-class community and six per cent from the upper class. Out of 188 reported cases, social information of only 111 was available. Three each, complaints were registered from scheduled tribe community at Bhoomika and Sakhi (OSC) respectively. Similarly, six per cent from scheduled caste community pursued help from Bhoomika helpline.

Concerns of alcoholism, lack of availability of alcohol, suspected infidelity or lack of spousal trust, refusal to sexual intercourse and even domestic workload have been reported as circumstances favouring violence. However, the greatest reason that has been reported as contributing to violence is a financial constraint (21%). There is no

doubt that the lockdown has negatively impacted the daily wage labourers and those working in the unorganized sectors the most. In addition to the current status of unemployment, the insecurity of whether there would be opportunities to find work, subsequent to lockdown, also contributes to considerable mental stress among many. Although there are many government mechanisms like free ration and community kitchens to support people during these trying times, none of these actually constitute perennial solutions to the worries and concerns of daily wage workers. Although financial constraints could impact both men and women, earlier studies have indicated that it disproportionately affects women and children more (Feminization of Poverty). Lockdown did upset the normative gender roles, the constant stay at home also forced or created opportunities for men to venture into the 'unpaid and unrecognised household chores'. But for many working women balancing between home and job was tightrope walk by depending on several support systems. Now the pandemic has made that option dysfunctional. While the woman stepped out to support the economic needs of the family, the family did not step up to take over her role in the household. From the field, facilitators also pointed out that unlike the condition during other disasters, the COVID 19 has set space for better interpersonal family communication.

During the first week of the lockdown, liquor shops were shut in Kerala, leading to a few suicide deaths. Alcohol is often a masculine motif and societies with strong patriarchal mores may add impetus to the state's position on alcohol. As reported by the ASHA workers who are part of the Psycho-social Intervention team from Ernakulam district, the lack of availability of alcohol has in fact created peaceful family environments. At the same time, the lack of physical availability of alcohol has also been reported as a reason for domestic violence (3%). It is reported that at least two cases of domestic violence induced by alcohol is reported every day at the control centre run by Ernakulam district mental health staff. The case studies reveal that some of the complaints continue to cite alcoholism (15%) as a reason contributing to violence. Seventy-two per cent of the complainants fall between the age group of 20 and 40 years. This is followed by those who are aged between 41 years and 60 years (21%). The number of complaints reported from those aged above 60 years was four per cent. However, it is found that two per cent each of the complaints which came to Bhoomika helpline was from below thirteen age group and three between the age of 13 to 19. The most common perpetrators of violence reported were the husbands (70%). The other reported perpetrators were parents-in-law (12%), children (5%), other family members (9%) and own parents (3%).

Helpline agencies reported that they were able to take necessary actions in case of the majority of complaints they had received, by the

provision of direct counselling, support from police, provision of health care and through the Women's Commission. While ten per cent were provided with medical care, thirty-five per cent were supported through direct counselling and fifty-two per cent required police interventions.

All the interviewed helpline service providers and concerned officials indicated that the number of unreported instances of domestic violence would definitely be greater than the number of complaints of violent episodes that they received during the lockdown. Reasons pointed were mobility restrictions due to social distancing measures, reduced connectivity through phone or internet, unawareness about the available support mechanisms, lack of opportunities to recharge mobile phones, financial constraints, constant presence of the perpetrators in the house, fear of others knowing it, the anxiety they would be rendered homeless consequent to reporting, that they would be left with nowhere to go, fear of social isolation and so on, indicate the common nature of the responses of service providers from various districts regarding the potential reasons for poor reporting of domestic violence.

Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and agencies were unable to intercede physically to the survivors as they were completely shut down during the lockdown. However, apart from providing tele-counselling, they helped women in distress by putting them in touch with the existing government systems. The field details from the community woman facilitators showed that persons from the lower economic and social strata placed relatively greater trust in and have greater access to, the support mechanisms functioning as part of the local governments, like the Jaagratha Samithi's and the Gender Resource Centres. Statistics may not reveal the real extent of the problem as women need space and time to reach out to helpline or concerned authorities.

Currently, there are several government mechanisms which handle cases/complaints under the DV Act and other associated legislation. Urgent steps need to be taken to ensure that the relevant cases are directed to these mechanisms promptly. The study recommended to ensure availability of on-call facility, integration between multiple helpline numbers available, provisions are made to remove the perpetrator from the house or relocate the survivor to a rescue home and bring to public attention through Chief Minister's daily press meet. In addition, collectives of men could also be convened to organize discussions and awareness campaigns among them against domestic violence, organise social media campaigns in association with Non-Governmental Organizations, provide training and guidance to the community woman facilitators to enhance their capacities and strengthen the functioning of Gender Resource Centres and Jaagratha Samithi's at Local Self Governments.

Thus, since the outbreak of COVID-19, emerging data and reports from those on the front lines, have shown that all types of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence has intensified. There arises the need for a collective effort to 'break the roots' that supports the growing shadow pandemic and make homes as safe zones to live.

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The Pursuit of Equality and Justice: Role of LSGs as Leveraging Agency for LGBTIQ Rights

The paper addresses the deeply rooted prejudices, hostility and widespread discrimination against LGBTIQ community, as hampering their fundamental rights. It proposes deliberations on the strategic role Local Self Governing bodies as leverage to tackle with these issues. Local and regional levels are decisive in combating discrimination and advancing equality and it is the paramount duty of these authorities to positively protect the rights of everyone. They have the capacity to interfere and create an apt background for a healthy, dignified living status of queer community by ensuring education, healthcare, safe and secure housing and employment. A deliberate and effective process is required for making them an integral part of the society.

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1. Introduction

The present scenario has been in the process of ensuring legal acceptance, security and rights of LGBTIQ community all over the world. Changes have been reflected in India as well where Policies and Bills have been introduced in recent times for Transgender and Intersex communities, same-sex relations have been legalized and many States are on their move towards uplifting these communities. We have been witnessing Queer Pride Marches in metro/small towns, and community based organisations mustering and raising their voice. One can, perhaps, argue that tremendous changes have been taking place, endorsing the visibility and articulation of queer life in public. Yet despite these advances, the social environment still has not changed, LGBTIQ people continue to face enduring barriers to their potential participation in public and attain complete legal and lived equality. Though our legal discourses have envisaged Queer/LGBTIQ rights, the existing socio-cultural environment has not attempted to unlearn the notions of morality and construct of normality.

The role of Local Self Governing bodies (LSGs) in functioning themselves as leveraging agency of LGBTIQ rights needs to be evaluated in this context. The ability, LSGs have, to reach to the local level and influence signifies its role to be at the forefront of transformation. They need to intervene systematically to bring ideological and pragmatic changes to the burning injustice and deep-seated prejudice against LGBTIQ community. Before exploring the broad range of domains where they could act as potential agencies of influence, it would be apt to examine the prevailing notion that sexual orientation, Gender identity and Gender expressions are 'suspect classifications' as far as LGBTIQ people are concerned.

2. LGBTIQ – The Categorical Identities under Harmful Norms

The notion that LGBTIQ classifications are suspect categories should be critically viewed against the assumption that the existing norms base their understanding on the framework of binary gender/sex structure. This has been historically, culturally and normatively enforced into practice where the binary, male – female, hierarchical relationship constituted the State operative institutes such as family, marriage, religion, law and similar realms. In its long process, a dominant and directive force has constantly operated in creating this binary status. As a result, gender norms and stereotypes have harmfully affected those who would not fit within the binary norms.

Through the binary structure of male and female, gender operates as a set of hierarchically arranged roles where masculine and feminine identities are not merely opposites; an assumption stands normalised therein that the masculine is dominant and

powerful while the feminine remains subjugated and weak. So the binary division carries superior and inferior positions and this in turn becomes functional in various ways. A gradual conformity causes these hierarchical structures to look natural and pre-determined. This structure is constructed within the basic premise of heterosexuality. As a result, the establishment of heterosexuality simultaneously produces hierarchies within its relationship. Gender identity needs to be explored beyond this binary notion. In the NALSA judgment, the Supreme Court refers to gender identity as,

Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body which may involve a freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or functions by medical, surgical or other means and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms. Gender identity, therefore, refers to an individual's self-identification as a man, woman, transgender or other identified category, (NALSA Judgment, April 15, 2014)

The concepts, sex, gender, and sexuality are surely inter-related. The anatomic distinction of a body as male/female limits one's understanding of difference. There are a number of indicators of biological sex including sex-chromosomes, hormones, gonads, internal reproductive organs, etc that have the capacity to redefine one's sex at several stages of one's life. The social pressure forces every individual to live a compulsory life on the norms based on the bodily marks determined at birth. In the process of normalising binary sex, another category of identity named Intersex is almost discarded. It is often treated as a disorder by neglecting the role of hormones and sex chromosomes in addition to genital organs, in determining the sex of an individual.

The concept of 'gender', is usually defined in relation to sex; it is considered as the cultural and social construction of sex. Gender operates in the form of masculinity and femininity, since bodies are already viewed through the binary structure of male and female. It reinforces the identities through a set of meanings made operative by bodily behaviours. It elaborates the binary quality of one's sexual identity through cultural constructions. The constructive and reinforcing nature of gender redefines the concept to gender variant, which could be deliberately broad, encompassing transgender, gender queer, transsexual, or varying identities across cultures. Historically and culturally diverse gender identities have been identified in India – Hijra, Kothi, Jogappa, Aravani, Kinnar, Mangalamukhi are some of those terms- and Transgender can be identified as an umbrella term encompassing diversities of gender identity beyond the binary. Gender expression is the external manifestation of one's gender identity.

The process of sexuality is also understood along the hierarchical structure of gender and sex. It produces expressions of desire through a set of socio-cultural processes. The 'naturalness' of sexuality is the outcome of cultural constructions of gender and the biological nature of sex as male and female. The 'naturalness' of sexuality could be contested by problematizing this constructive nature. Sexuality could be viewed as an identity based on the structure and the expression of desire. There are enduring patterns of romantic or sexual attractions across cultures categorically identified as homosexual, bisexual, asexual or pansexual, besides heterosexual orientation.

The dominant sexual and gender paradigms can be critically perceived as having harmful impact upon LGBTIQ community. Heterosexuality has been a powerful conceptual tool or category that regulates not just sexual behaviour, but the ways in which gender is defined. As a result, it plays a critical role in determining who gets treated as an acceptable social subject. However, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Inersex people are not mutually exclusive identities. Different sexual minorities need to be understood in terms of ambiguities, fluidities, and continuities which move beyond the dichotomies of male versus female.

The harmful effect of gender norms and stereotypes have disproportionately affected the Queer community in every walks of their life. LGBTQ individuals are at a significantly increased risk and they require qualified immunity against the increasing hostility, discrimination, intolerance, violence, domestic abuse and hate crimes. In order to ensure the law, Local administrative agencies can manage and implement schemes that design and reflect true needs of the community, encompassing areas such as health, education, safety and participatory representation in LSG's planning and implementation fields.

3. LSGs and LGBTIQ Rights

It is crucial that the protection of rights and participation of queer community be essentially made possible in a democratic process. Local Self Governing body can institutionally function as a rudimentary structure for their participation as it has direct access to individuals and subunits of the society. LSGs have tremendously worked towards such initiatives and have socially drove and coerced people to realize vicissitudes of democratic and progressive movements. Being closer to ordinary people, the system has historically brought different marginal units of the society to the forefront and made their representation through social awareness, unity and participation in planning and governing realms. This could be in one sense perceived as reinforcing LGBTIQ struggles for survival, as the process of

inclusion reflects ideologically the basic features of Panchayati Raj: Transparency, participation, social justice and accountability.

In the present social situation, queer communities have been exposed to various forms of discrimination and aberrations. It is not surprising that this has been continuing even after the Supreme Court verdict, (NALSA Judgment, April 15, 2014) founded upon the Constitutional rights, and governing bodies policies and guidelines at various institutional levels. This contradiction continues to persist as social misunderstandings and moral notions fail to accept a comprehensive knowledge of sex, gender and sexuality. The irony that Queer people also used to rely on these notions of abnormality and feel themselves to be guilty has more or less been rectified as realisations taking place in the form of community building, sharing experiences of similitude and empowering themselves through mutual support and pride.

Similarly, changes have been surfacing recently. There are scientific, historical and cultural narratives on visibility, participation and representation being introduced under academic disciplines of Queer Theory and LGBTIQ studies. Scholarships and reservations have been introduced in various universities and colleges. Transgender Cell and Justice Board have started functioning under Government departments. Gradual visibility is found in the form of literature, under mainstream publishing houses. But there are atrocities, mob attacks, domestic violence, forceful psychiatric treatments, increasing suicides and murder of queer people taking place at the outskirts, not often documented in any of the clinical, investigative and media discourses.

The absence of such narratives has resulted in evaporating real life experience of queer community from the surface of mainstream social understandings. Though there are strategic inclusions found in academic theories and policy guidelines, the visibility and articulation of queer persons have to be established as tangible and authentic life experiences. The forces that forbid them from embracing their legal rights have to be keenly addressed. Moreover, the de-humanised and hostile attitude of the mainstream society formed out of fake moral concerns should be interrogated and rejected. Deliberations have to be continued on the fact that constitutional rights and values are fundamentally pertinent to the dignified status of any human being, while working to reduce disparities faced by LGBTIQ community.

With all supportive measures in the form of policies and theories, it is the responsibility of the society now, to shape perspectives on inclusive reality. It is in this context that, the role of Local Self Governing bodies to be explored. LSGs need to take the responsible

steps as they can influence fractions of society, working at the grass root level and affect lives of individual/family/miniscule of society in ways both big and small.

4. Learn from the Oppressed

The Brazilian philosopher and educationist Paulo Freire propounded the idea of public education in his work *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which can be consulted in this regard. He says, “the oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.” (Freire, Paulo, 1970). While analysing the history of oppression confronted by LGBTIQ community, it is evident that at various levels, the community has raised their own forms of resistance and struggle for survival. These struggles and resistant tools have boosted their energy to fight, empower and articulate themselves. Similarly, the oppressor in the power structure should also be awakened to this reality. The oppressor reinforces social norms under the malice of notions of patriarchy. It should be looked down upon as offensive if they continue to remain ignorant of the fact that human beings are of diverse nature in this world. Their deliberate attempt to remain unaware of the struggle and resistance of a section of the society fighting for their rights should be treated as criminal offence.

Since those ignorant majority belongs to the mainstream society, their attempt to represent themselves as spokespersons of every human being should be invalidated, and no rights should be entitled to them to enforce their beliefs and notions as the ultimate upon the marginal sections of the society. An all-encompassing and transparent methodology of learning at the local level can uplift and make the queer community participate in the planning and development fields of local administration. There should be a justifiable and proportionate participation ensured to a community that was historically being subjected to discrimination, alienation from all forms of participation and reducing to the status of a discrete powerless minority within the social structure.

Only a methodical and systematic inclusion would provide equality. An experiential participation of the Queer community will be able to fight and eradicate the deliberate ignorance of the mainstream society. It is by nullifying false beliefs and by replacing with tangible bitter stories that social justice be effected. This is a representative process that requires intense accountability. By introducing projects that would provide social security and welfare to queer community and by making solid queer participation, these responsibilities can be accounted. The policy domains of cooperation, participation, administration, planning and implementation can be actively utilised to reduce the gap between mainstream society and queer community and make Inclusive Development more effective.

Queer community faces several detrimental challenges. Ostracism from schools, homes, and workplaces lead to vulnerable and threatening circumstances of socio-economic insecurities, suicides or unhealthy life situations. Often such incidents are not reported or unveiled to the outside world. Even the oppressed themselves do not often report such hate incidents as they are muted and subjected to hatred and violence. Many undergo forced and abhorrent practices of conversion therapies, domestic violence, physical and mental torture.

Sexual orientation or gender identity can have a significant impact on a person's physical, mental and sexual health and wellbeing. Existing evidence shows that health outcomes are generally worse for LGBTIQ people than the rest of the population, and that LGBTIQ people feel that their specific needs are not taken into account. The local governments can have instrumental approach and broader responsibilities as they are reachable to small fractions of the society. Their proximity to local institutions of family, education, and healthcare can be efficiently utilized in addressing issues at the local/primary level. Chances are higher at the local level, for LSG bodies to notice such incidents and mainstream the issues.

5. Conclusion

LSGs have been, incidentally, able to reach the bottom line of the society and are aware of the sentiments that are prevalent in their representative areas. The system is already being structured in this fashion that we often find how they extend welfare schemes and projects to communities that need more attention and care such as women and children, old-aged persons, Scheduled castes and Tribes and similar oppressed sections. Related insightful interventions may be extended to LGBTIQ community who live in trauma and torture. Jagrata Samiti/Vigilance Committee may be indisputably utilised as a platform for appropriate interventions. Important contributions to achieving respect of LGBTIQ persons' human rights can be made by raising awareness of their issues and campaigning to promote mutual respect and understanding. Negative attitudes must be challenged, homophobia and transphobia tackled, and supportive links created.

The local legislative institutes have the capacity to interfere and create an apt background for a healthy, dignified living status of queer community by ensuring education, healthcare, safe and secure housing and employment. A deliberate and effective process is required for making them an integral part, respecting their human dignity and diversity. The array of tools at their disposal can be effectively used to create a sensible, respectable and proportionate society. This vision may be envisaged for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expressions, to be able to live safe, dignified

and healthy lives where they can be themselves without fear of discrimination.

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Combating Covid-19: Odisha Model of Empowering the Panchayats

Odisha, a state with a poor health infrastructure, did remarkably well in containing Covid-19 by empowering the local governments. The state delegated the magisterial power vested with the District Collector to the Sarpanches for Covid management, accorded them frontline warrior status, and ensured the financial autonomy. The local governments in Odisha, became the fulcrum of activities to combat the pandemic, like awareness generation, distribution of essentials, creating data bank of migrants and students, quarantining returnees, managing the Temporary Medical Camps (TMC), etc. The Odishan experiment of combating Covid 19 with the support of the local governments have become the entry point to strengthen decentralization in the State, and elsewhere in India.

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1. Introduction

Pratima Sahoo Sarpanch of Kimbhiriapala Gram Panchayat (GP) of Bari Block in Jaipur district declared a 24 hour shutdown on Gobindabati area, after two persons tested positive corona virus. The Sarpanch also sealed the village using Collectors power entrusted on her by the State Government. Chachalin Swain, Sarpanch of Sugude in Barchana Block sanitized the entire Chandikhole Bazaar on NH-16 and also ordered 48 hour shutdown as the market had been witnessing a surge of migrants returning to their home. All such migrants were sent to the quarantine camps arranged by the Panchayat. This is the case with almost all the Gram Panchayats in the State. The State Government's spokesperson on Covid 19 remarked that the Panchayats in the State are rising to the occasion to make mandatory quarantine for those returning from outside, negligence if any on the part of Panchayat can aggravate the situation and put the public in danger. This statement shows the trust and confidence that the State has on the Panchayats in their fight against the pandemic. Panchayats have already set a historic benchmark in disaster preparedness during the 2013 cyclone called Phailin.¹

2. Big Bang Approach

On 19th March 2020, the State of Odisha took a path breaking decision of delegating the power vested with the District Collector to the Sarpanches of Gram Panchayats (GPs) for their jurisdiction under 51 of Disaster Management Act 2005 and Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897. The ground was set for the Panchayats to immediately act on 11th March 2020 itself, declaring Covid 19 as a disaster under section 2(d) of the Disaster Management Act. The Executive Committee of State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) has the power to give direction to any of the departments or authority to take action against combating the disaster. Accordingly, the State Government issued broad guidelines to the Sarpanches of the Gram Panchayats to take measures for preventing the spread of the virus. This bold decision was taken at a time when the progress with regard to decentralization has been low and Panchayats having only modest degree of autonomy due to numerous systematic bottlenecks and institutional challenges. The sudden action of the Government of Odisha of devolving power and finance is 'big bang' in nature that empowers the Panchayats to a great extent, which has not happened in any of the State in India at

1. Phailin – A Cyclone that ravaged the coast of Odisha on October 4th 2013.

the right time of managing the pandemic.

3. Panchayats: The Fulcrum of Activities

Foreseeing the danger of pandemic ahead, planning started from the day one itself. On 8 March 2020 itself, when most of the States have not cared much on the spread of the virus, Local Governments in Odisha began the Information Education and Communication (IEC) programme. It is important to note that when the first international passenger flight landed during Covid 19, officials made a thorough screening and sent the passengers to quarantine for fourteen days at the airport itself. With this incident, the massive awareness generation programme began. The coverage was much beginning from state level officials down to the Palli Sabha² members. The SIRD, Bhuvaneswar took a lead role in capacity building. Specialised trainings were given to three-tier Panchayat members to play the role of effective leaders for combating the pandemic. Masks, gloves, and sanitizers were distributed by the Panchayats on a large scale and that too on free of cost. Free food distribution, helping the patients, aged and children were all vested in the hands of elected representatives of Panchayats and the volunteer team constituted at the ward level. Direct Gram Sabha meeting, keeping social distance, was conducted by many of the Panchayats. A few of them conducted virtual Grama Sabhas for passing information and eliciting the local needs. Technology empowerment of the citizens was ensured through whatsapp groups using smart phones and also with the support of community radios. Gram Panchayats also set up data banks for the first time, which contained details of migrant labours, students studying abroad and other cities in India, and people employed or staying in other States and foreign countries. The persons who are returning were to register in the Panchayat first, and the Panchayats communicate with them promptly.

On 22 April 2020, the Chief Minister administered an oath to all the Sarpanches of 6,798 GPs in the State which read 'I take pledge to sincerely work towards containing the spread of novel corona virus in my Panchayat for the public good, I will ensure keeping the people coming from other States in quarantine and look after their stay, food, and treatment.'

The CM stressed one important aspect saying that the pandemic would last for sixth months for which they were supposed

2. Assembly of voters in a ward of Grama Panchayat.

to make strategic planning, foreseeing the consequences ahead. The number of cases in the State stood blank at that time and the first case was diagnosed only on 16th March 2020. Odisha poorly featured on the list of well performing public health system in the country. In the Niti Ayog's health index 2019, Odisha did not even figure in the top ten states. (http://social.niti.gov.in/uploads/sample/health_index_report.pdf). On April 25, when Covid 19 effected rate in India reached 26,263, Odisha had only 94 cases of Covid 19. It did not pick up much because of the precautionary measures taken by the State, District, and mainly by Local Governments. It could be stated that Odisha never had an effective health system. The much praised varied activities carried out by the Government included increased testing, resource allocation to the Local Governments, and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model for treatment. It is the combined efforts that resulted achieving the reduced mortality rate and high recovery status.

4. Meticulous Management of Institutions

The State Government clearly knows the fact that 7.5 lakhs of out-migrant workers in the State, of this 5 lakhs are supposed to come back. Even in the lockdown days, they would leave the job and are supposed to reach their own home. It is here that the Temporary Medical Camps (TMC) were set up at the Panchayat level. Earlier, the Chief Minister in his address to all the Sarpanches in the State had to set community quarantine centres and organize medical camps. State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) was devolved to the Panchayats for this purpose. There was flexibility for using the XIV Finance Commission grant also. Two things were made compulsory; first registration at the Panchayat level, and second mandatory quarantine for 14 days. The Panchayat level officers and health workers receive the returnees and take them to the quarantine centres where they would be provided with all facilities including food and medical aid. And also an out of pocket allowance of Rs. 2,000/- after the successful completion of stipulated time period. By the end of April 2020, there were 1,49,896 TMCs with total number of 2,00,015 beds in all the Gram Panchayats. In the meantime, Panchayats also started distributing the benefits of the welfare schemes to the farmers, old age people, and scholarship to the students. Through Public Distribution System (PDS)³, 82 lakhs of people were provided with food grains. The MLAs also supported the Panchayats providing money from MLALADs. And Panchayats used

3. Door to door distribution of food items through the PDS was entrusted with volunteer team of Panchayat.

4. MSP is a separate department that would exclusively work for the 70 lakh rural women through 6 lakh self-help groups for livelihood activities. Panchayats covered their programs with Mission Shakti.

it in a convergent mode as per the need of the locality. In the earlier phase, MPLADs were used for the purchase of medical essentials. There was integrated approach with higher level PRIs i.e. at Panchayat Samithis (intermediate local government) and Zilla Parishads (District local government).

5. Reversing the Economy

As the recession created by the pandemic may hit the common people, precautionary measures are taken at the local level with effective mechanism for reversing the failing economy. Ensuring the life saving essential commodity is a prime factor. Varied activities have been carried out by the NGOs and CBOs with the overall support of the Panchayat. Through Mission Shakthi Programme (MSP)⁴ women empowerment got a boost through various focused activities. Seventy lakhs women under this programme became the frontline Corona Warriors. They provided essential commodities through 600 shops and mobile applications.

Panchayats have also organised training sessions for the migrants to groom them into community health issues. These sessions were being conducted at Panchayat level quarantine centres, where the migrants have to stay further. Agencies such as UNICEF supported the Gram Panchayat to carry out the programmes. The participants would be getting a sum of Rs. 150/- per day as honorarium for attending the programme. After going to their respective villages, they are designated by the best warriors fighting against Covid 19.

The Self Help Groups (SHGs) are supporting the Panchayats in a big way. Some of the SHGs came out of their routine activities and join hands with the Panchayats using their tailoring skills. Some of the SHGs made face masks, gloves, aprons, caps, and face shields with the guidance from Panchayat members and health workers.

Panchayats have also started to make new job cards under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to help the returnees. Once a person completes quarantine period, he or she can earn from the very next day itself using the new job cards. As there is flexibility in the Grama Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) prepared by the Panchayats, alterations are also made in the plan to redeem the economic distress that might arise in future. With the experience of a short span of two months, Panchayats have developed long term development vision in their fight against

Covid 19. This has been reflected in the future course of activities that they have formulated.

6. Mapping the Skill Efficiency for Generating Employment

With the sole aim of generating employment to the returnees, including migrant workers, the Panchayats in Odisha with the support of Technical Education Department and SHGs have entered into a new venture of mapping the skill set. This helps the Labour Department to fill the existing vacancies and also to prepare a list of talented people for the newly arising opportunities. More than 3.5 lakhs of migrant labourers have already returned within the short span of one month. More people are also expected in future. Human resource is required very much for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and for the new projects. Government is thinking to fill the labour gap with the support of the Panchayat's skill mapping. Panchayats are running TMCs and quarantine centres directly. It is estimated that fourteen days time is enough for them to map the skill and provide the list to the Government.

7. Result Oriented Programmes

In Odisha, people are confident of recovering over Covid 19 as the State's recovery status has been impressive, when comparing with other States. The growth rate is down by nearly half over last week of May 2020. When the national average reached at a higher level with 1,31,324 patients and the recovery and death cases stand 54,440 and 3,867 respectively. On the 61st day of lockdown, Odisha has the credit of lowest number with 1,052 positive cases, 307 recovered persons, and the death toll limited to single digit. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Odisha and Kerala are the two well performing States in India. The data between April 12 and 18 shows that Odisha and Kerala have doubling dates of positive Covid 19 cases. The flattering of the curve in Odisha was quick because of the strengthened local governance system and bottom-up approach adopted by the government.

8. Dimensions of Decentralization

The State issued guidelines to empower the Sarpanches by delegating the power vested with the District Collector, opens new avenues for strengthening democratic decentralization in Odisha. When praising, the question arise whether the power is centering round the Sarpanches. Field responses show that Panchayat Committee and

the recently constituted Village Action Groups (VGCs) are constantly informed and involved. There are instances of convening Palli Sabhas keeping social distance and at times virtual Gram Sabhas for ensuring people's participation. In the first time, State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) is reaching directly in the kitty of Gram Panchayats where it is spend as per the need of the locality. That is why the Chief Minister has conferred on the Sarpanches the title of frontline warriors for organizing a movement against the pandemic with the involvement of the community. To add to this, the Chief Secretary also commented that the participation of community and Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in managing Covid 19 is the greatest achievement of Odisha. Even without proper direction from the State, the Panchayats carried out a wide variety of programmes in combating the pandemic. They have shown their autonomy, quick response, and immediate action breaking the hierarchical lines. It may seem to be perverted in form but has necessitated to suit the needs of the people. The best example is the perfect management of TMCs, which has been hailed from different corners.

Panchayats also concentrated its attention on non-medical areas. Foreseeing the economic distress activities were strategically planned for the promotion of agriculture and livelihood, especially in the Green Zone. The concept of self-reliant village gets a new impetus. The migrant workers who worked tiresomely outside the State now got the chance to work committedly in their home village, when new job cards were issued by the Panchayats. The new work culture was accepted by the educated community, when they switched on to manual work.

The enhanced role of NGOs, CBOs, SHGs, deviating from their traditional role gave inspiration to the activities of the Panchayat. Some of the NGOs and CBOs put aside partially their on-going activities and joined with the Panchayat in organizing awareness program, distribution of food items, preparing masks and sanitary items. Actually they were entrusted with other activities such as handicrafts, weaving and textiles. The spirit of volunteerism among the youth and students knew no bounds. Low cost and costless activities were carried out on a large scale. The team work reached the level of officials from various other departments such as Police, Revenue, and Labour coming together and joining hands with the Panchayat. For the first time, Panchayats were able to create data bank that helped

them in proper planning. So also technology empowered the citizens and reached the common man when it was widely used for passing message and giving updated information.

9. A Noble Gift

Here is the story of a noble gift of two migrants who expressed their gratitude to the Panchayat and School authorities, when they got commendable service during the 14 days of quarantine. The inmates were 60 in number – 51 from Coimbatore and 9 from Hyderabad who had arrived school turned – quarantine centre on 13 May 2020. The School, Berhampur UPS situates in Dhumuchhai Gram Panchayat. Out of immense pleasure, the migrants decided to present a gift at the time of their farewell. Dakua and Jina, two patients, were entrusted to bring out beautiful portraits. These two belonged to a nearby Panchayat in the same district of Ganjam. They showed their talent in painting the life size portrait of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, Martyr Bhagat Singh, and Mother Theresa along with well-known pilgrim sites. The School and Panchayat authorities provided with painting materials. They worked sincerely and portrait was ready at the stipulated time period and would be much inspiring the school children. The migrants said that the Panchayat has been doing a great service to the community. They were very homely, when they were provided with delicious meals daily at 12 noon, snacks and tea at 5 p.m., and dinner at 8 p.m. They showed their gratitude through this beautiful portrait. It was with much reluctance that they left the school.

10. Conclusion

The bottom up approach worked well in the State of Odisha. The Government had realised even at the beginning that the fight against Covid 19 could not be won without the participation of the local leadership. So they delegated the magisterial power vested with the District Collector to the Sarpanches. Once the activities began at the local level, people joined hands with the Local Governments and extended whole hearted support. At one point, the Chief Minister accorded frontline warrior status to the Sarpanches for their dedicated activity and declared an amount of Rs 50 lakhs as compensation assistance to the family members; if any Sarpanches causes casualty in the fight against pandemic. This instilled much confidence in the Chief Minister and the people in one tone hailed Naveen Patnaik, the Chief Minister of Odisha, ‘the Savior’.

The stand taken by the Chief Minister to bring all the Odishans back to its soil was because of the support he got from the ground level, especially in managing the TMCs. Earning a stay in the court directive for health screening, nearly two lakhs of them returned within last three weeks of April itself. The Panchayats could manage them to settle in the quarantine centres. This open mindedness shown to the people who had gone outside for livelihood has been much acclaimed.

The success stories coming from Odisha in their fight against the pandemic can be largely attributed to the role played by the Local Governments. Empowering the Sarpanches by devolving the powers vested with the District Collector might seem to be a little effort in this regard. But it has long-term repercussions. With this, Panchayats in Odisha have become the fulcrum of power. Arguments are there that through another executive order the power vested with the Sarpanches can be taken back. But that may not happen as grassroots approach got impetus during this time. Moreover, Panchayats have earned the faith of the people on a large scale. In turn, people have full confidence in the activities of the Panchayat. Combating Covid 19 with the support of the Local Governments have become the entry point to strengthen decentralization in the State. But if decentralisation is to become reality, much needs to be done in the coming future. The corona crisis has thrown up a lot of opportunities for a policy road map for the future. It has highlighted the importance of strong Local Governments and showcased the spirit of decentralized governance where the local, state, and national governments work in tandem responding to the situation. The Local Governments have become more powerful and this power is exercised in a responsive, accountable, and transparent manner. The Odishan experiment shows that the local governments are to be further empowered to enable them function in a responsive, accountable, and transparent manner.

Notes:

- i. Inferences from the interviews with Sarpanches of Kimbhiriapala Gram Panchayat and Sungade Gram Panchayat of Jaipur District. Whatsapp messages were sent to get information. Saroj Dash, Joint Director, SIRD Bhuvaneswar provided relevant Government Orders and Circulars.
- ii. Training materials, pamphlets, notices and exhibits published by SIRD, Bhuvaneswar.
- iii. Letter giving permission for Temporary Medical Camps using SFC/CFC funds –

- Panchayati Raj & D.W. Department, Govt. of Odisha dated 17.04.2020.
- iv. Direction to the Sarpanches – Order No. 2232 R&DM (DM Revenue and Disaster Management Department, Govt. of Odisha dated 19.04.2020
 - v. The Hindu, Corona Virus Odisha reports, dated 01.05.2020.
 - vi. The Indian Express, Corona Virus outbreak report, dated May 15, 2020
 - vii. India Today, Covid 19 lockdown, April 19, 2020
 - viii. The Wire, Odisha has Emerged as on Underrated leader, article, Anwar Patnaik, Anshuman Sharma and Asit Mohanty, 5 May 2020.
 - ix. Cover story, Sarpanches as Game changers, Prafulla Das, Frontline print edition June 5, 2020.
 - x. Common News, Sketch for Life – Quarantined inmates in Ganjam Lead by example, peoples voice Odisha, May 21, 2020

Role of Local Governments in combating COVID -19: A Case study of Kunnukara Grama Panchayat in Ernakulam District

This paper analyses and profiles the varied administrative, medical, social, technical and resource mobilization strategies adopted by one local body in Kerala - Kunnukara Grama Panchayat, which helped them effectively curtail the Pandemic's first wave in its territory. Kunnukara Grama Panchayat was able to control and deal with COVID-19 first wave in a humane manner. The well-established local body network consisting of elected representatives, Kudumbashree- SHGs, Asha and Anganwadi workers, Palliative care network proved to be a strength to deal with the pandemic in an orderly manner. The Panchayat also bagged the SKOCH award-Silver for its comprehensive covid response activities. This case study thus holds significant pointers on how institutions and stakeholders in a local self-government can play a key role in dealing with a pandemic.

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1. Introduction

Declared as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11th March 2020, the impact that the novel coronavirus pandemic has had on the world has been unparalleled in the history of human civilization. The aftermath of the pandemic is something that cannot be gauged yet as corona cases continue to escalate around the world (WHO, 2020).

Kerala was the first state in India to report a case of COVID-19— a medical student who had arrived from Wuhan, China tested positive in Kerala's Thrissur district at the end of January 2020. After reporting two more cases Kerala announced a state calamity (Sulaiman, Muhammad, A P, & Afsal, 2020). Unlike other states of India, Kerala's response in curtailing the spread of the virus and maintaining low mortality during the first wave received huge praises from around the world especially considering its high density of population, large proportion of elderly and high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (Thankappan, 2020). From January 2020, Kerala started preparing systematically to handle a possible outbreak. The experience of having dealt with two episodes of the Nipah virus and the flood in 2018 along with the State's strong public health system and local government structure proved advantageous when it came to coping with the pandemic. During January–February 2020 State level Rapid Response Team was formed under Health Minister and War room was initiated, Covid cells formed in all line departments, State Medical Board issued Technical and Medical directions and Grass root level action team devised at the Local Government level which was coordinated and consolidated at the district and state level.

The well-established local body network consisting of elected representatives, Kudumbashree- SHGs, Asha and Anganwadi workers, Palliative care network proved to be a strength to deal with the pandemic in an orderly manner. Moreover, the confidence and trust that the citizens have towards the government helped in the easy implementation of health initiatives at the local level (Raghuram, 2000). The government order empowering the local governments as the agency to prepare the local-level disaster management plan has made local governments more self-sufficient in dealing with contingencies (Isaac & Sadanandan, 2020). Thus, the strategies and measures adopted by various local governments in dealing with the pandemic hold significant lessons for meeting future disasters. This paper analyses and profiles the varied administrative, medical, social, technical and resource mobilization strategies adopted by one local

body in Kerala - Kunnukara Panchayat which helped them effectively curtail the pandemic's first wave in their territory.

2. Strategies of Kunnukara Grama Panchayat in Combating Covid 19

Kunnukara is located in the Paravur Taluk of Ernakulam district, Kerala. The total geographical area of the Panchayat is 1265 hectares. It has a population of 21,765 consisting of 10,610 males and 11,155 females residing in 15 wards. The population density is 1576 sq. km. compared to Kerala's 859/sq. km. Children in age 0-6 constitute 9.76 % of the total population while those aged above 60 years account for 16.6% all of whom are most vulnerable to the pandemic. In 2011, the literacy rate of Kunnukara village was 94.61 %, male literacy 96.58 % and female literacy rate 92.78 %. The working population of the panchayat is 37.7% and the main source of income is agriculture with brick manufacture being the main industry revealing the rural nature of the area. The Panchayat, which was devastated by the floods of 2018 was still trying to overcome challenges posed by that natural disaster when this pandemic struck. Notwithstanding such constraints, it initiated a slew of measures to deal with Covid 19 which are analysed under the following heads.

2.1. Administrative Measures

Panchayat took a proactive role in ensuring quick decision making and consensus building through a number of administrative measures. The triggering point was the video conference by the Chief Minister on March 19, 2020 addressing all local governments and guiding them on various measures / initiatives to be taken followed by periodic guidelines and circulars from State to all local bodies.

Subsequently, the steering committee in Kunnukara Panchayat was expanded to include members of the opposition party and entrusted with decision making power for taking rapid action which was ratified at a later stage by the Panchayat Committee. Ward level sanitation committees were reorganized including Janamaithri police volunteers. Covid-19 Rescue Team, a 250 members WhatsApp group of frontline workers was formed on March 19th 2020 for instantaneous communication and coordination. All decisions to be taken were posted early in these communication channels inviting suggestions that helped build consensus and collective ownership and reduced instances of discord and dissent. For easy and effective service, multi-tier functioning was followed even at local level. At the Panchayat Level, People Representatives, Village officials, Steering Committee, Police Officers etc. provided overall coordination and decision making. Each ward in the Panchayat was divided into small ward clusters, which

includes 30-40 households and a person was selected to supervise each who would respond to people's needs ensuring availability of quarantine, medicines and food. The Ward Level Community Group consists of Ward members, ASHA Workers, Anganwadi Teachers, Health Staff, Residents Representatives, Volunteers, Kudumbashree etc. were assigned responsibility for providing all assistance and coordinating activities at the cluster level.

2.2. Health / Medical Measures

Challenges on the medical front included taking initiatives to control the pandemic as well as meeting the needs of the patients with other diseases. The local palliative care team visited every bed ridden patient at home. Free medicines and transportation facilities were arranged for those needing dialysis and cancer treatment. Medical services were also arranged for old age homes. A 24-hour control room in the Primary Healthcare Center (PHC) was set up to coordinate health activities and the timings of PHC were extended to offer a wider window. The Panchayat also provided psychological counselling especially to their frontline workers to help them cope and ensure their wellbeing.

In addition, several comprehensive measures were taken to curtail the spread of the pandemic. For grassroot level strengthening of the "Break the Chain" campaign of the State Government, 50 hand washing facilities were arranged in public spaces and offices in the Panchayat. Contract workers were arranged to sanitize public spaces and the Panchayat office on April 6th 2020. Vehicles coming from other districts were sanitized.

To meet the surging demand for masks, local production was undertaken by Kudumbashree. On 22nd April 2020, the decision to make the use of masks compulsory in public spaces was taken. A total of 10,400 free masks were distributed to all households in the panchayat providing two masks per household. Another 2000 masks were made available to all needy at a reasonable cost of Rs 8 per mask. Free masks were distributed to all frontline workers. To educate the public about the proper usage and disposal of masks, mike announcements were made on sterilization, safe use of eco-friendly cloth alternatives and proper disposal of single use disposable masks. Meetings were held with representatives of community halls and religious leaders to ensure that a minimum number of programs took place maintaining social distancing. Field visits were done to all commercial establishments and shops in the Panchayath to promote and ensure social distancing.

Studies reveal that safe quarantine of proper duration lowers the risk of COVID-19 disease by 44-81% and mortality by 31-63% (Nussbaumer-Strei, et al., 2020). Hence quarantine of patients, their primary contacts as well as potential carriers were intensively used to curb spread, Kerala having a huge population living abroad or outside the state, every returnee was requested to register on Kerala Government's Covid-19 Jagratha¹ site, tested at the state borders or at the airports and requested to remain in home quarantine for 14 days. Details of such returnees were notified to the respective secretaries of the Panchayat (Maneesh & Alaoui, 2020). Kunnukara Panchayat redirected this information to the local monitoring team i.e. Anganwadi/ASHA workers who then followed up through phone calls, field visits and cross checking with neighbors. The use of social networks not only ensured effective quarantine but also supported in providing essentials to the needy. The protocol to be followed in house quarantine was printed and distributed. Twenty two Anganwadis, one lower primary school and one pakalveedu² were equipped with amenities to provide institutional quarantine facilities for those who had no facilities at home. The task of sanitizing the used quarantine rooms was given to the Fire Force Service and rooms were kept vacant for three days before accommodating the next inmate. As of 6th July 2020, the number of people under quarantine was 383.

It has been reported that older adults and those with comorbidities such as diabetes, heart diseases, chronic lung disease, cancers, and other diseases are more vulnerable to COVID-19 mortality rates. Similarly, children, differently-abled people and other vulnerable groups are most at risk from this virus (Gulia & Kumar, 2020). The strategy of reverse quarantine which involved separating such vulnerable segments from others was used as a practical and inexpensive solution to protect them. Six thousand four hundred and forty two people were protected through this strategy in Kunnukara which had a high 16.6% aged i.e., above 60 years in their total population. Arrangements were also made to shift quarantined people in the event of Floods in 2020. Facilities equipped with 1000 beds were identified in the nearest town of Kalamassery and transportation with separate cabins and PPE kits were readied to prevent spread during transfer.

1. Covid19 Jagratha is a portal designed for disseminating information related to Covid 19 for public and provisions for accessing emergency services for the public. It is a comprehensive solution for effective daily reporting/monitoring of the quarantine and health status of the people under surveillance by Field Health Workers.

2. Pakalveedu is a concept of the Government of Kerala which stands for the welfare of the elder people, where they can spend their lonely time with other elderly people. The respective Local Self Government Institutions would be in charge of the Pakalveedu in every Panchayat.

Another initiative was boosting the immunity of the public through the use of alternative medical systems and promoting healthy food and environment. On 6 April 2020, Ayur Raksha Task Force was constituted and immunity building ayurvedic medicines distributed to all 5200 households in the Panchayat followed by homeo medicines on 9 April 2020. Vegetable cultivation was encouraged at homestead level and Rs. 54 lakh Subhiksha Keralam project³ was launched using plan funds of Panchayat to promote vegetable cultivation on a big scale and cultivate fallow lands. Free seeds were supplied to participating households and awards were presented to active performers to incentivize participation. Haritha Karma Sena⁴ members collected biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste and transported it to recycling units. Around 200 tonnes of solid waste were removed during the lockdown in 2020 to ensure a healthy environment. Public spaces were cleaned by the MGNREGA workers, which apart from ensuring healthy surroundings also provided livelihood support to many vulnerable segments particularly women.

The lockdown resulted in blockages in the food distribution system which led the government to implement a new system of food distribution by integrating local governments as well as the public. Kerala was the first state to start community kitchens that were run by local governments where food preparation and supply was done by one of the largest women's group in India known as the Kudumbashree mission. The chief minister stated that around 75 per cent of these community kitchens were run by Kudumbashree (Biju, 2020). While maintaining social distancing the community kitchens prepared 2.5-2.8 lakh of food packets per day. Community kitchens prevented crowds from gathering in public places thereby reducing infection rates.

2.3. Social Measures

To ensure basic necessity of food during the 21-day nationwide lockdown, 4 Community Kitchens became operational from March 24 to deliver free food to the most needy, migrant workers, elderly, and those in home quarantine. From March 28th, free meals were provided to around 450 needy people daily by these Kudumbashree units. The panchayat set up a helpline and anybody who called that number got food delivered to their home by volunteers.

Free provision kits were also supplied by the panchayat to migrant laborers, people in home quarantine, buds school students,

3. 'Subhiksha Keralam' Project or Padhathi is a program by Government of Kerala which aims to combat food scarcity in the state by bringing fallow land under vegetable, fruit, tuber, paddy and other crop cultivation.

4. Haritha Karma sena is a professional team consisting of Green Supervisors mainly Kudumbashree Women who will be assigned with the responsibility of collection, transportation, processing, recycling / disposal, and management of waste materials in association with respective LSGs.

needy households of Non-Resident Keralites etc. Seven thousand and three hundred food kits were distributed through 8 Public Distribution Systems. Free food kits were provided to 35 differently abled students of BUDS school. There were a total of 282 guest workers in Kunnukara Panchayat at this time. Free food kits were distributed to them in two rounds on April 2nd and April 15th 2020. The Panchayat collected data about the guest workers, enquired if they were under the contractor, whether they were staying as a group or independently, visited them etc. The panchayat took initiative in following up and ensuring continued accommodation provided by employers. Medical checkups were conducted for them and a coordinator was appointed to deal with their grievances and issues. Arrangements were made for booking return tickets for them. Such basic rights approach to guest labourers at the grassroot level was the hallmark of Kerala's response which has been well recorded (R, Pandi-Perumal, Gulia, Gupta, & Kumar, 2020). Pravassi Chitti was popularized and could provide access to funds to Non Resident Keralites for setting up entrepreneurial units in turn opening up a livelihood opportunity for them.

To increase the purchasing power of people, speedy distribution of many welfare pensions was ensured with old age pension being distributed to 1900 elderly, Karshaka Thozhilali pension⁵ to 631 farm workers, Widow Pension to 900 widows, Disability pension to 308 disabled and also pensions to single aged women above fifty years. Further, to facilitate continuing education tablet challenge was held in June 2020 to provide tablets to underprivileged students, 24 television sets distributed for accessing Victors channel, the State Government's educational channel, and 12 net connections given.

2.4. Communication Strategies – Mix of Modern and Traditional Technologies

Another noteworthy feature of Kunnukara was the mix of both traditional and modern technologies used for the spread of information and effective communication. Mic announcements in the local language were made in all wards to create awareness. The volunteers distributed notices to all 5200 households containing instructions to be followed. On March 28th the Panchayat instituted awards to households for effective implementation of central and state Covid guidelines. To deal with the influx of Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs) returning to the panchayat and identify their needs two WhatsApp groups were

5. Karshaka Thozhilali pension or Agricultural Labour Pension is given to Agriculture labourers of age of 60 years or higher, permanently residing within the Kerala State for a continuous period of not less than 10 years and should be worked as agriculture labour for a period of 10 years or more under landowners.

6. Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is a flagship program of the Ministry of Education launched in 2014. It aims to link the Higher Education Institutions with a set of at least 5 villages, so that these institutions can contribute to the economic and social betterment of these village communities using their knowledge base.

formed in Panchayat in which 500 people registered. An app called COVID CARE APP was developed freely by the local engineering college to ensure transparency and share information regarding all arrangements regarding Covid -19 to the local public. In addition, as mentioned earlier, COVID 19 Rescue team WhatsApp group was formed with 250 frontline workers to coordinate activities. All covid management activities of the Panchayat were analysed, compiled in a power point presentation and highlighted at the national level using voluntary services of St. Teresa's College - through the Unnat Bharath Abhiyan⁶ linkage. Thus, modern technology was extensively used for not only improving communication and coordination but also consensus building and documentation.

2.5. Resource Mobilisation and Conservation Strategies

A noteworthy feature of this local government is the efforts that they had taken in recent years to mobilise their own resources through hundred per cent collection of property tax. Such own resources along with plan funds were a major strength that helped in organizing many of the above activities. The panchayat also mobilized voluntary funds for such activities. Another feature worth emulating is the use of voluntary services of all available education institutions to support IEC and documentation which resulted in such service delivery at zero cost to the local body. Such resource mobilization as well as conservation enabled the panchayat to contribute Rs 5 lakh of own funds to the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund.

3. Challenges Faced

The going was not all smooth and a number of challenges were faced in implementing the above initiatives, which included the arrival of few expatriates without complying with procedural measures, stigmatization and reluctance of people to provide home/room quarantine to their family members, funds for long term sustenance of community kitchens, non-availability of volunteers to clean institutional quarantine facilities, disposal of used masks and PPE kits, rehabilitation of Non-Resident Keralites etc.

4. Conclusion

Kunnukara Panchayat was able to control and deal with COVID-19 first wave in a humane manner notwithstanding the above challenges. Till end of December 2020, only 2.35 per cent of total population in Kunnukara tested positive for Covid-19 and only one person lost life despite the fact that most of neighboring areas were containment zones with community spread. The Panchayat also

bagged the SKOCH award-Silver for its comprehensive covid response activities (National Award for Kunnukara, 2020). This case study thus holds significant pointers on how institutions and stakeholders in a local self-government can play a key role in dealing with a pandemic. The coordinated, supporting and complementing functioning of the local government led by the opposition party with the State Government led by another political party reflects the basic principle of decentralized democracy that it is the people and only the people who matter and are the ultimate stakeholders.

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Local Self Governments and Financial Literacy In India

Financial literacy, which is now considered as a core life skill, is an important element in the development process of our country. It is the ability to understand basic financial concepts and the possession of knowledge and skills required to make informed and effective financial planning, decisions using the available financial resources. It is alarming to know that the financial literacy rate in India is way behind other countries. Now a days financial literacy is gaining increasing importance as a policy objective in many countries. OECD/INEF played a vital role in putting financial literacy and education at the centre of the global policy agenda. In July 2012, RBI prepared and released a draft National Strategy for Financial Education (NSFE) which calls for the active involvement of individuals, financial sector regulators, educational institutions, NGOs, financial sector entities and governments at different levels. It is imperative that local self governments are playing an important role in making the development process of our country more inclusive. It provides us an unprecedented opportunity to mediate with the local people for the successful implementation of development projects. Thus this paper aims to study how financial literacy levels of our country can be improved through local self governments as their role is indispensable in development administration in every areas of our country.

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1.Introduction

We are living in a time where financial literacy is considered as a part of functional literacy, which is an essential capability and indispensable precondition for the society to function. Financial literacy is a core life skill for participating in modern society with complex financial landscape (OECD, 2013). It refers to a set of skills that allow people to manage their money wisely along with some understanding of essential financial concepts. Most of the researches conducted by international organisations and by national authorities indicate that a major section of people is ill equipped to take advantages of new financial opportunities and responsibilities (OECD/INFE, 2013a; the World Bank, 2013b). Thus, financial literacy has gained a prominent position in the policy agenda of many countries and the importance of collective informative, reliable data on the levels of financial literacy across the adult population has been widely recognised (OECD/INFE, 2015; OECD 2016). National strategies for financial education are increasingly being put into place by policy makers worldwide to address the financial literacy needs of their populations (OECD, 2013). This policy trend began in the early 2000s mostly in developed economies (including, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States) and spread in the aftermath of the financial crisis (OECD/INFE, 2009). According to OECD a national strategy for financial education is “a nationally co-ordinated approach to financial education that consists of an adapted framework or programme, which:

- Recognises the importance of financial education -- including possibly through legislation -- and defines its meaning and scope at the national level in relation to identified national needs and gaps;
- Involves the co-operation of different stakeholders as well as the identification of a national leader or co-ordinating body/ council;
- Establishes a roadmap to achieve specific and predetermined objectives within a set period of time; and
- Provides guidance to be applied by individual programmes in order to efficiently and appropriately contribute to the national strategy.” (OECD/INFE, 2012; OECD, 2013)

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development International Network on Financial Education (OECD/INFE) played a vital role in putting financial education and financial literacy at the centre of the global policy agenda, including through its substantive work and strong collaboration with the G20, Asia Pacific Economic cooperation (APEC) and other key international financial inclusion and customer protection organisations and stakeholders (OECD, 2018). This effort has resulted in the development of National Strategies for Financial Education in over 60 countries to date.

2. National Strategy for Financial Education in India

Building on OECD's global paradigm, India's National Strategy for Financial Education (NSFE) aims to "spread awareness about basic financial products in order to link new users to the formal financial sector, to educate existing users of financial products and services to make informed choices and to ensure consumer protection for all the users."(NSFE, 2012). A top-level institutional structure was created in India in 2011 as a Technical Group to focus exclusively on Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy, under the aegis of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC). The FSDC is chaired by the Ministry of Finance, with heads of all financial sector regulators as members. The Technical Group on Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy is headed by the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and includes representatives from all financial sector regulatory authorities. This group co-ordinates the efforts of the financial sector regulators in the field of financial education. The draft National Strategy for Financial Education (NSFE) for India has been prepared under the guidance of this group in 2012-13. The NSFE firstly target the financially excluded population by providing basic financial education on fundamental tenets. At the second level, a sector-focused approach will target primarily financially included consumers. For that four policy areas have been identified: banking, the securities market, insurance and retirement planning. At the third level, consumers will learn the features of various products available in the market. The NSFE also plans to create a dedicated institutional structure whose main roles would be creating standard financial education material covering all identified policy areas, and developing and maintaining a website on finance, which will be a one-stop repository for all financial education activities. The standard financial literacy material will be made available in India's various regional languages to ensure a wide

reach. The strategy also calls for active involvement of individuals, financial sector regulators, educational institutions, NGOs, financial sector entities, multilateral international players and the government at both the central and state levels (OECD, 2013).

3. Financial Literacy Trends

The 2012 edition of Visa Global Financial Literacy Barometer demonstrated that India is lagging behind the global standard and it secured 23rd slot in the over-all ranking (VISA, 2012). The level of financial literacy in India is very low (24 percent) as compared to BRICS Nations (28 percent) and European Nations (52 percent) in the year 2015. The survey by Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC (S&P) confirms that financial literacy in India has consistently been poor compared to the rest of the world. S&P Global Financial Literacy Survey, which is the world's largest and most comprehensive global measurement of financial literacy gave a clear picture on the trend of financial literacy world wide. The survey conducted in 2014 shown that only 33% of adults world wide are financial literate which includes 30% of women and 35% of men². (L.Klapper et al.) According to financial literacy survey conducted by NISM in India only 25% of urban population and 15% of rural population are found financially literate. 18% male respondents are financially literate which is 1.5 times of female literate respondents. (NISM, 2013)

4. Role of Local Governments

India being a federal state, constitution provides a three tier governance structure - union at the top, state at the middle and local governments at grass root. As world's largest democracy, every adult citizen of our country enjoys some direct and indirect involvement in the system of government. For a more stronger economy and fairer society, inclusive growth in the economy is essential. For making the development process of our country more inclusive local self government is imperative (Aiyar, 2014).

In order to address various problems of our economy like inability to meet basic needs such as housing, health, education, water etc the poverty, unemployment etc, large quantum of resources are spent at the local level and several schemes and programmers with considerable budgetary allocations are implemented (Rajasekhar, 2012). They are playing an important role in the successful implementation of various developmental programs of our country.

It provides us an unprecedented opportunity to mediate with local people as they will mobilize people's active involvement and cooperation for implementation of development programmers. Be it the National Population Policy-2020 or the newly launched NRHM or MGNREGA now cannot be effectively implemented to achieve the desired target and upto the satisfaction of clients without involving local self government in a lead role. They have deeper reach, easy acceptance and more familiarity in the rural areas. This makes their role indispensable in development administration in every areas of our economy like universalisation of education, health care, population control, poverty alleviation programs etc. Recognising the crucial role of local self governments, government has taken care to assign them to lead role in various newly launched schemes like watershed development programmes, housing projects, environment protection.

5. Promotion of financial literacy through local governance

A decentralised approach which lead locally and with the assistance of local communities is the best and most efficient way to promote financial literacy in our country. The government makes policies but local administration should be made responsible for measurable success along with periodic program tracking and reviewing success parameters.

People learn best at places they are familiar with and through medium of people whom they trust. Community Service Centres (CSCs), managed by the people of the village itself and at locations which the people are familiar with can do more to increase financial literacy (Anurag Gupta, 2019). Education on finance, insurance, tax and consumer affairs an be done through this. Finance related lectures should be organised at community centres and participation level of people should be monitored since participants of such lectures are small compared to other courses like child care. These lectures should focus on educating people on availability of various deposit, credit and remittance products offered by bank. Risk awareness and insurance are the area of financial education which does not get enough attention. Our society have a low level of awareness of the risks they face. And they lack knowledge about insurance products and issues. Due to lack of proper awareness, people buy insurance policies without adequate planning and give up midway because they don't have money to pay the premium. Tax awareness is one of the core areas the government should pay special attention and should

conduct well-organized campaign promoting taxpaying and explaining why it is important.

Consumer affairs centres can be introduced at local levels to provide consultations, consumer education and consumer information services. It can alert consumers from multiple debt problems and aware people about fraudulent sales or crimes. Rural indebtedness is a major issue in our country and financial literacy is highly correlated with the indebtedness of our people. Financial literacy can enable people to save more and avoid higher levels of debt. By providing more information about safe credit lending agencies and making the people more accessible to formal money lending systems through consumer affairs centres, indebtedness can be controlled to a large extent. Since financial products are increasingly diverse and complex financial literacy gains more importance. The rapid development of mobile technology and social media has led to increasing risks of investment scams and other fraudulent activities. Such activities can be stopped only by making people financially aware or literate.

Local governments are public entities, separate from financial industry groups and individual financial institutions. Thus financial education through local governments will be more strong and improved as a channel for financial education for people reflecting the unique features of each local area. They can identify what is required for that particular area. In some areas major portion of the population may be excluded from the formal financial system. They need steps to include them to the formal system. Some area may be characterised by high income groups who are included in the formal system but lacking more information about investment opportunities, insurance, retirement plans etc. Based on gender, age group, employment etc also the need for financial literacy differ.

Vulnerable sections of people do not have access to private financial advices. They tend to have low income and heavy financial burdens. Living in close-knit groups, they integrate less in the community, and have lower financial literacy than other population segments. Some may have less access to financial services, be reluctant to get external help and be less capable to recover from financial shocks (Financial Literacy Strategy, 2019). Thus local governments can make cooperative agreements with financial education organisations in order to improve the financial literacy level of the weaker sections of our economy.

Local governments can also take initiative to observe financial literacy week, which include awareness programmes, debates, talks etc. Financial Literacy Week is an initiative by Reserve Bank of India since 2016 to promote awareness on key topics every year through a focused campaign. Financial Literacy Week 2018 and 2019 were focused on “Consumer Protection” and “Farmers” respectively. The theme selected for current year FLW is “Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs),” which was observed from February 10 to February 14, 2020.

6. Conclusion

Financial literacy is a way by which individuals can enhance their understanding of the financial concepts, markets, and products to take effective action to improve overall well-being and avoid distress in financial matters, especially vulnerable people of the rural area and thus improve their financial status. Even though many initiatives have been undertaken by government and other financial organisations to improve it, financial literacy is very poor in India due to their incapability to absorb the same. Local self governments can play an important role in this situation as they have deeper reach among people. Thus through various initiatives at local levels financial literacy should be increased as it contribute to build a more progressive nation.

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Resource Mobilization by Local Governments: Case Study of Kunnukara Panchayat in Ernakulam District

Significance of Local Governments have never been more highlighted in Kerala than in recent times considering the central role played in combating various disasters both natural and biological. Considering the need of fiscal resources to enhance the capacity of local governments this paper analyses total funds mobilized by Kunnukara Panchayat in Ernakulam District, its growth and composition over past six years. Own source revenue of Kunnukara Panchayat has shown stability and growth over the period. Major chunk of own source revenue consists of tax revenue particularly property tax which has been increasing in significance. The Panchayat has been relatively successful in enhancing per capita OSR, tax revenue and property tax through various strategies While these are laudable, the fact that own resources still account for a meager percentage of total resources warrants collecting additional revenue through revision of tax rates and greater mobilization of non- tax revenue.

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1. Introduction

Kerala state has been acclaimed as the pioneer of genuine decentralization and democratization of local governments in India for over two decades. This has never been more highlighted than in recent times considering the central role played in combating various disasters both natural and biological which the state has been reeling under. The Government of India has also clearly acknowledged the criticality of Local Governments in combating Covid 19 through release of funds for them. Significance of fiscal decentralization program to enhance the capacity of local governments has been stressed from early times, since sans that, decentralization becomes inoperative and meaningless (Oommen, 2008).

The fiscal portfolio of the local self-governing institutions is based upon income from 'own revenues' and 'assigned and devolved revenues' of the government. Own income or Additional Resource Mobilization (ARM), an accepted criterion for the distribution of Plan funds to the states, is considered to be more advantageous to the developed panchayats (Nair G, 2000). Though Kerala state devolved more resources to the lowest levels of government, they generally face resource crunch. The scope for further budgetary devolution from the State Government is also limited due to resource constraints (Nair, 2004). Several studies suggest that local bodies shouldn't always depend on the state for obtaining funds and should tap the potential of own tax revenue and non- tax revenue for efficient functioning (Anithakumari, 2015-16).

This article examines the total funds that are mobilized by Kunnukara Panchayat in Ernakulam District, analyses growth and composition of the funds over the past six years along with the strategies that are adopted by the Panchayat to mobilise resources.

2. Resources of Kunnukara Panchayat

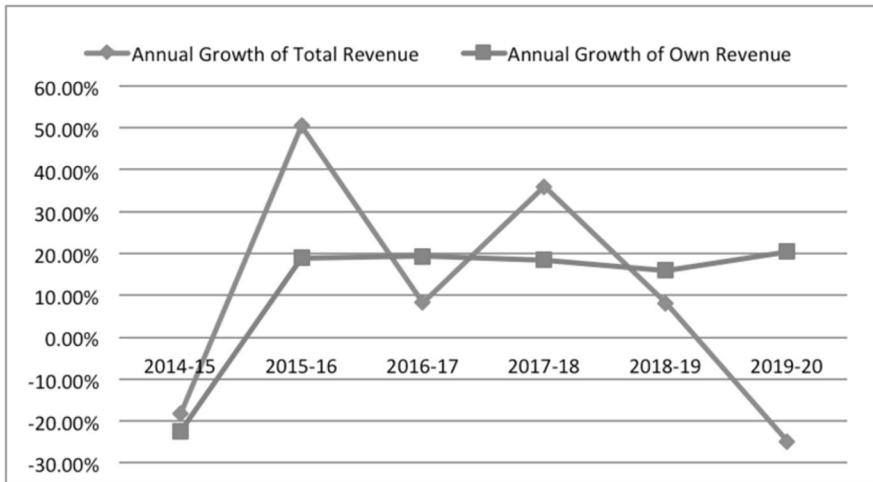
Kunnukara is a census town belonging to Parakkadavu Block Panchayat in Ernakulam district with a population of 21765 and an area of 21.23 sq. km. Kunnukara is noted for its efficient revenue mobilization.

2.1 Growth Trend of Total Revenue and Own Revenue

The annual growth rate of total revenue and own revenue of Kunnukara Panchayat is shown in the following figure 1. The annual growth rate of total revenue varies significantly over the six years under study while that of own revenue shows a more steady pattern indicating that own revenue offers greater stability. Total revenue

has shown a negative growth of -24.91% in 2019-20 mainly due to the direct transfer of Rurban mission fund to poverty eradication department rather than directly to the Panchayat. At the same time, annual growth of OSR was -22.39% during 2014-15. In 2019-2020, OSR growth was higher compared to the previous years.

Figure 1 Annual growth of total revenue and own revenue

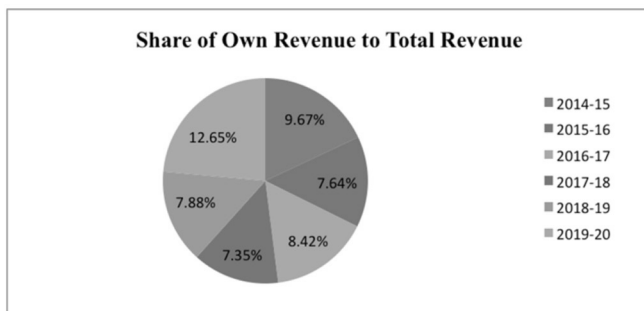


Source: Secondary data from Panchayat

2.2 Contribution of Own Source Revenue in Total Revenue

However the proportion of OSR to the total revenue of Kunnukara Panchayat was only 9.67% in 2014-15 (Figure 2). During 2019-20, an increase can be seen in its proportion to 12.65% as compared to all the previous years and this can be partly explained by increase in absolute amount of own revenue as well as decrease in base total revenue due to direct transfer of Rurban mission funds.

Figure 2 Share of Own Revenue to Total Revenue



Source: Secondary data from panchayat

2.3 Per Capita Own Source Revenue

Estimation of per capita OSR revealed an amount of 235.33 in 2014- 2015, shows an upward trend in the next four consecutive years and has increased to Rs 554.45 during 2019-20 (Table 1).

Table 1 Year wise total and per capita own source revenue and its components, Kunnukara

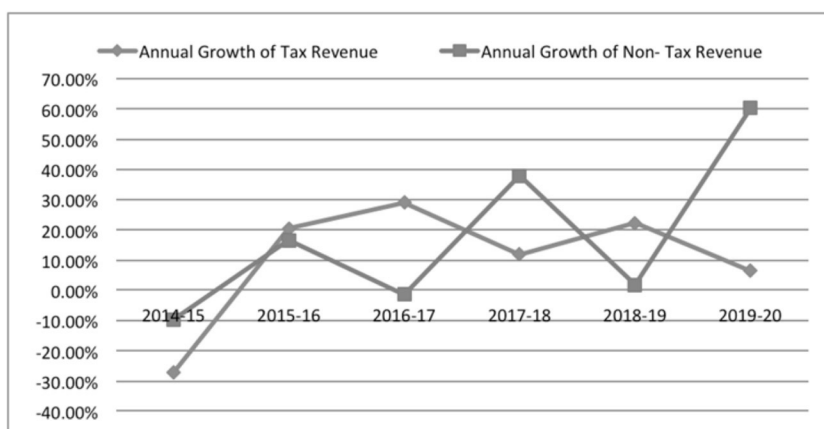
Year	Own Source Revenue (Rs)	Per Capita OSR (Rs)	Own Tax Revenue (Rs)	Per Capita Tax (Rs)	Per Capita Property Tax (Rs)	Per Capita Profession tax (Rs)
2014-15	51,21,908	235.33	34,69,652	159.41	90.50	67.35
2015-16	60,96,675	280.11	41,74,439	191.79	102.18	87.57
2016-17	72,77,901	334.38	53,84,258	247.38	142.29	98.84
2017-18	86,31,186	396.56	60,21,813	276.67	159.19	116.10
2018-19	1,00,08,054	459.82	73,55,857	337.96	221.21	116.76
2019-20	1,20,67,550	554.45	78,18,358	359.22	238.62	120.60

Source: Secondary data from Panchayat

2.4 Growth Trend of Tax and Non-Tax Revenue

Analysis of components of OSR, reveals that annual growth rate of tax revenue is more stable compared to non-tax revenue (Figure 3). Non-tax revenue showed a significant increment of 60.21% in 2019-20 due to considerable increase in interest earned on fixed deposits which was about Rs. 6.39 lakhs. Further Tax revenue accounts for the major source of OSR accounting for nearly two thirds of OSR (Figure 4).

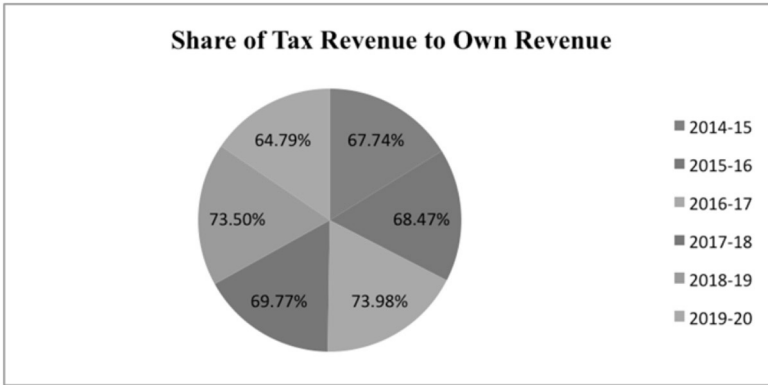
Figure 3 Annual growth of tax and non-tax revenue



Source: Secondary data from Panchayat

2.5 Contribution of Own Tax Revenue in Total Own Source Revenue

Figure 4 Share of Tax Revenue to Own Revenue



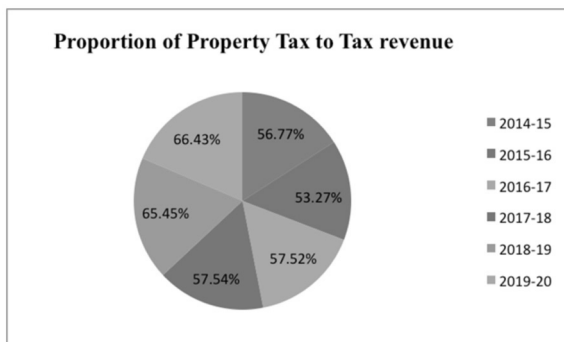
Source: Secondary data from Panchayat

Though the proportion of tax revenue in OSR marginally declined in these years, absolute amount of tax revenue has consistently increased over the years. Per capita tax mobilized by Kunnukara Panchayat was 159.41 in 2014-15 which increased Rs 359.22 in 2019-20 (Table 1).

2.6 Contribution of Property Tax in Total Own Tax Revenue

Figure 5 depicts that within tax revenue, property tax account for the major chunk and its significance in total tax revenue has been increasing in recent years. Proportion of property tax to tax revenue increased from 56.8 % in 2014-15 and to 66.43% in 2019-20. Correspondingly there is decreasing significance of profession tax in total tax revenue in recent years.

Figure 5 Share of Property Tax to Tax Revenue



Source: Secondary data from Panchayat

Estimation of per capita property tax reveals that it was only Rs 90.5 in 2014-15 which increased to Rs 238.62 in 2019-20. In 2014-15, per capita profession tax was only Rs.67.35 which increased to Rs120.60 in 2019-20. Panchayat attained 100% property tax mobilisation by 2018-19 Kunnukara adopted several methods to mobilize own revenue at the current rate band. In order to make the process of revenue mobilization easy and hassle free, Panchayat organized camps in different wards which enabled taxpayers to make tax payments with very little physical efforts. Major portion of the revenue of sample Panchayat is mobilized through such collection. To create awareness among the public regarding the need to mobilize more local resources, effective campaigns are conducted through announcements and by conducting various activities. Though some taxpayers show reluctance in tax payments especially due to the current pandemic situation with increased job loss, Panchayat has made efforts to convince them regarding the need to mobilize revenue for efficient service delivery. They have also revised basis of calculation of property tax to account for plinth area of buildings. All these enabled the Panchayat to mobilize revenue effectively and has achieved 100% mobilization of property tax since 2018-19.

Analysis of tax rates levied revealed that in the case of residential properties, rate band levied by Kunnukara is Rs. 5 per M² and for industrial buildings for ceiling area below 100 M², rate band opted is Rs 40 M² which is lower than the ceiling prescribed rates. Thus despite its laudable achievements, the Panchayat is not realising its full tax potential which can be attained by levying the ceiling rates of Rs. 8 per M². The main reason behind this is reported to be reluctance showed by tax payers who claim they cannot afford higher rates.

3. Conclusion

Own source revenue of Kunnukara Panchayat has shown greater stability that grants and receipts and grown has grown in years slightly increasing in share of total resources of the Panchayat. Major chunk of own source revenue consists of tax revenue which also exhibits greater stability compared to non-tax revenue. Within tax revenue major contribution is from property tax which has been increasing in significance over the years. The Panchayat has also been relatively successful in enhancing per capita property tax through various strategies, such as revision of basis of calculation to account for plinth area of buildings, 100 per cent compliance through awareness campaigns and mobilization camps. While these are certainly laudable, the fact remains that own resources still account for a meager percentage of total resources of the Panchayat and they depend primarily on grants and receipts from State and Centre for resources. Taking into

consideration the financial crisis of the State Government which could adversely affect future flow of resources, the Panchayat needs to now focus on collecting additional revenue through revision of tax rates as well as greater mobilization of non- tax revenue.

Acknowledgement

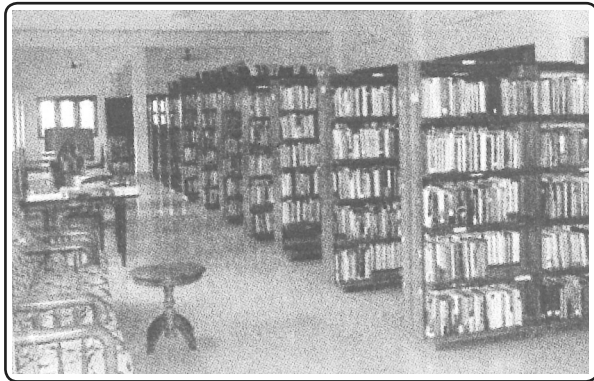
We are grateful to Shri. Francis Tharayil, Former President, Kunnukara Grama Panchayat, Shri Sunil Pandipullil, Secretary, Prasad A., accountant and all other staff in Kunnukara Grama Panchayat for providing necessary data and information regarding their revenue.

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KILA Library

KILA library has a collection of over 10,000 books and over 200 journals, focused on KILA's thrust areas. The collection of books and periodicals of the Library is focused on the themes of Panchayati Raj, local governance, participatory planning, poverty alleviation, rural development, urban development and management. It has full-fledged information centre on local governance, with state of the art facilities like computer and Internet. With this purpose, a new library complex has been constructed.



As part of computerization of Library, KILA installed KOHA software in the Library. An online Digital Repository for local Governance has also been created by KILA and the website is www.dspace.kila.ac.in.

Influx of Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: Issues of Human Security and Employment Opportunities

Bangladesh is now hosting around one million Rohingya refugees and this highlights the serious concern of human security. Myanmar government has been very reluctant to take back their nationals, the Rohingya, despite the robust diplomatic endeavors of Bangladesh government regarding repatriation. Providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. Rohingya refugees are seriously at the risk of human trafficking. The Rohingya influx has set on the host networks an exceptional weight, aggravated by the way that these regions were at that point went up against with imposing difficulties with relatively weak socio-economic development. Impacts have been particularly related to a fall in daily wages for labourers and extremely adverse impacts on public services and the environment. Refugees are not legally entitled to work in Bangladesh. This leads to seek employment illegally. They are exposed to serious risks in doing so including unfair/unsafe work conditions, harassment, exploitation and extortion. While emergency support was quick to arrive, long-term continual support is essential, particularly in view of the uncertain length of stay of the Rohingya refugees. While pressing for eventual repatriation, Bangladesh and international community should move past short-term planning and work together to build safe housing, improve refugees' educational and livelihood opportunities, and support refugee-hosting communities. Apparently, Bangladesh has been untiring by putting pressure on the Myanmar government to take back its citizens by creating a safe and secured environment.

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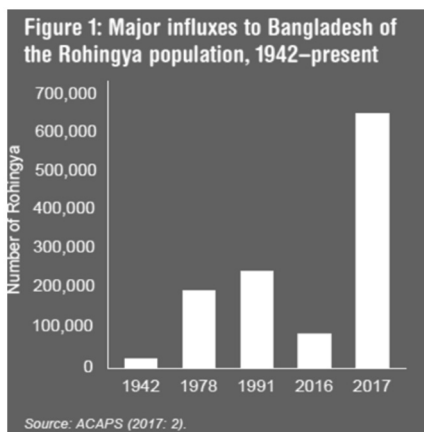
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1. Introduction

Human security denotes human dignity. The term human security propagated by UNDP in the post-cold war era intends to focus on individuals coming across values and goals such as dignity, equality and solidarity. The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar that has due to persecution, crossed into neighboring Bangladesh over decades, laying uneven pressure on the scarce resources of Bangladesh (Gain, 1992). Rohingya issue has been textbook example of ethnic cleansing navigated by the civil-military administration of Myanmar. Influx of Rohingya refugees has been in Bangladesh since the 1970s and their number has surpassed 700,000 (Islam, 2018). Strangely, Bangladesh is now hosting about a million Rohingya refugees those results in serious concern of human security.

Myanmar government from the very beginning was very reluctant to take back their nationals, the Rohingya despite the robust diplomatic endeavor of Bangladesh government across level. Although in the repatriation of Rohingya to their homeland will be ambiguous in coming days and at the same time, their stay in Bangladesh might be continuing for a longer period of time. Apparently, providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. The Rohingya crisis has been emerged as potential threat to Bangladesh's internal stability. Bangladesh, therefore, has been in a great fix struggling to realise the national interests of the country, and uphold human security issues of Rohingya all at once (Ahmed, 2010). The Rohingya is an ethnic minority group in Myanmar has crossed into neighboring Bangladesh over the decades, laying uneven pressure on the scarce resources of Bangladesh.

Without doubt, human security has been the emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities whose proponents challenge the traditional notion of national security by arguing that the proper referent for security should be the individual rather than the state. The objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats, in a way that is



consistent with long-term human fulfillments (UNDP, 1994). Human security takes its shape from the human being: the vital core that is to be protected. Institutions that undertake to protect human security will not be able to promote every aspect of human well-being.

And what kinds of arrangements the host government has, to deal with this additional population living in Bangladesh paying attention to human security as well as livelihood opportunities until their repatriation have been the central questions of this undertaking? The study is based on content analysis and therefore, the study broadly undertook a survey of important articles, books and other sources pertaining to the study topic. This review of the professional literature relevant to the study findings helped to contextualize the research.

2. Rohingya Refugees and the state of their Human Security and access to Employment Opportunities

It is apparent that the number of Rohingya refugees has crossed half a million since the beginning of the crisis from August 24, 2017. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), Rohingya issue has been textbook example of ethnic cleansing navigated by the civil-military administration of Myanmar. Influx of Rohingya refugees has been in Bangladesh since the 1970s and their number has surpassed 500,000. Figure-2 showing Upazila wise Rohingya population sheltered in Cox’s Bazar district of Bangladesh after their influx from Myanmar.

Upazila	Population (2011 census)	Estimated population (excluding Rohingya) (2017)	Rohingya population in host community (Jan 2018)	Rohingya population in camps (Jan 2018)	Total Rohingya population in both camps and host community (Jan 2018)	% Rohingya in total population (Rohingya and host community)
Cox's Bazar Sadar	459,000	517,150	7,941	-	7,941	1.5%
Ramu	266,600	310,100	1,640	-	1,640	>1%
Teknaf	264,400	307,300	64,571	64,986	129,737	29%
Ukhia	207,400	241,100	4,609	756,450	761,059	76%
Total	1,197,400	1,375,700	78,941	821,436	900,377	39%

Note: Population figures are rounded off.

Source: Government Census 2011, IOM NPM Round 8; ISCG 07/01/2017, ACAPS, 2017: 3

Strangely, Bangladesh is now hosting about a million Rohingya refugees those results in serious concern of human security. Experience suggests that the Myanmar government has been very reluctant to take back their nationals, the Rohingya despite the robust diplomatic endeavor of Bangladesh government across level (Lewis, 2018). It gives the impression that the repatriation of Rohingya to their homeland will be ambiguous in coming days and at the same time, their stay in Bangladesh might be continuing for a longer period of time. What we could perceive, providing basic provisions of their life like food, shelter, and healthcare have been the utmost priorities at the moment

and also for the rest of the period until the return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar.

Prolonged stay is bringing about pitiable human security condition of Rohingya community. The Rohingya refugees who are downright marginalized are seriously at the risk of human trafficking. It is evident that international human trafficking gangs are actively looking at this situation to mishandling the vulnerability of the Rohingya for abusing. Mentioning stubborn Rohingya crisis as potential threat to human security, UN agencies working in Bangladesh have been in appeal to the international community for adequate fund to provide them basic supplies for survival. It is the experience of different countries which hosted refugees during many humanitarian crises that international supports lessen over time if the refugee crises continue (UNICEF, 2019). In this kind of situations, the decisive economic affliction of humanitarian support to the refugees falls on the host country.

Given their living space mostly located in Teknaf-Cox's Bazar areas, the refugee earmarked areas are adjacent to the settlements of the local citizens. Once, many awkward incidences happened between them causing law and order situations. In the future, with increasing number of the refugees and sheltered close to the native citizens' settlements there is the likelihood of increasing happening of such incidences and aggravating the local social and cultural harmony among the local citizens and the Rohingya refugees. Security concern particularly non-conventional (human security), is another challenge that Bangladesh is already facing and it will intensify further in the future with the influx of the Rohingya refugees over the years. Bangladesh government has been accredited for providing them with various facilities, including shelter, food and medical care despite many limitations (Uddin, 2018).

Health security and food security has been the evolving challenges in the makeshifts where refugees are living. The pitiful state of people's shelters illustrates how utterly unsustainable and unsafe this life is. Humanitarian community working in Cox's Bazar needs to prioritise repairing and replacing the battered shelters so that people have some protection against the elements, and are provided with at least some basic comfort and dignity. Apparently food insecurity within the displaced Rohingya refugee population is turning out in Bangladesh. This has been resulting in malnutrition with refugee population and if not the food situation improves on an urgent basis, there is likelihood that more Rohingya children could even meet life-threatening event. We should keep it in mind that, the country has to rely on the food grains for domestic consumption. Meanwhile, the government of Bangladesh took many steps for resolving the Rohingya

crisis while various forces, including the Armed Forces, police, Border Guard of Bangladesh and Rapid Action Battalion along with the civil administration, public representatives and general people are providing necessary services to the Rohingya.

As regards economic security, the bulk departure of Rohingya in Bangladesh would endanger the market balance. This may result in unstable labour market as supply will be more than the demand Bangladesh has at present. Jobless people will seek whatever means necessary to make a living and this sort of unhealthy completion in the labour market will seriously threaten the social cohesion. Cultural differences perhaps remain as major challenges of the Rohingya refugees to come across other associated encounters. I find language has been the utmost impasse to adopt with the changed circumstance and this is the reason why children of this settlers have been suffering from self-imposed fence to get light of education. The existing public health conditions in the camps are unsatisfactory due to poor sanitation facilities, poor water quality, space limitation and increased population.

It is evident that, transnational human-trafficking syndicate committed serious crime against the Rohingya from 2012 to 2015. In a six-year investigation on human trafficking in Thailand and Malaysia, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) and Fortify Rights, a nongovernment rights body have found the evidences. The time series research findings also signpost that, during 2012-15, more than 170,000 people boarded ships from Myanmar and Bangladesh bound for Malaysia and Thailand, and the trade over Rohingya is estimated to have generated between \$50 and \$100 million a year (Daily Star, 2019). In the course of recent years, help offices have improved sanctuary conditions, constructed more secure foundation, and created storm readiness in the camps. Be that as it may, the philanthropic reaction remains fundamentally underfunded.

No matter how rapidly the Bangladesh government needs the repatriation, a more drawn out term plan with proper strategies is currently required to help the Rohingya populace. Any desire for an early emergency goals would be lost, in light of the fact that the Rohingya emergency has numerous parts to determine—for instance, their rights to come back with citizenship, fitting conditions in Rakhine for a protected return, preparation by the Rohingyas, geo-political power battles among neighboring nations, and the job of the universal network. It might take years, even as long as 10 years, to locate an equitable and practical arrangement. The present the present state of affairs encompassing the emergency shows the requirement for a long view requiring concurrent and extended commitment on numerous

fronts for a feasible arrangement, including further help to the dislodged Rohingyas in the camps.

The 2019 Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya helpful emergency has gotten just a third, or US\$301 million, of the \$920 million expected to address the issues of the Rohingya displaced people and host networks in Bangladesh this year. The Joint Response Plan takes note of that, “The safe house materials and catastrophe hazard decrease preparing gave to the outcasts in 2018 are lacking for assurance against unfavorable climate conditions.” This speaks about the serious threats towards human security of Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh. It is revealed from the report produced by Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) on Rohingya Crisis and Response hosted led by IOM that, Bangladeshi Immigration and Passports Department has registered 971,627 people through biometric registration (UNDP, 2018). Given the terrible state of human security at the Rohingya refugee camps, Bangladesh is likely to face the serious challenges with the influx of Rohingya refugees in the following areas:

- Pressure on employment; depression of daily wage and cost of living
- Loss of school years (for locals and Rohingya)
- Health issues among Rohingya and locals (mortality and morbidity, chronic malnutrition, respiratory illnesses, etc.)
- Deforestation; loss of biodiversity and ecosystem and natural calamities (landslides)
- Unethical activities (drug and human trafficking, prostitution etc.)

What we have found in many cases, refugees are selling large quantities of certain in-kind assistance received as relief items. Rice, lentils and cooking oil are mentioned as being the most traded. Their purchases of other products, on the other hand, push prices up. Rohingya purchase several items, including potatoes, fresh vegetables, meat, fish and firewood, thereby raising prices on those goods. Conventionally, refugees are not legally entitled to work in Bangladesh. Inability to survive without employment leads many refugees, particularly men, to seek employment illegally. They are exposed to serious risks in doing so including unfair/unsafe work conditions, harassment, exploitation and extortion. A high proportion of refugee men, some assisted by their adolescent sons, resort to informal work to supplement humanitarian assistance. This includes work as unskilled labourers, fishermen, rickshaw pullers and salt and brick factory workers. Refugees working illegally are open to exploitation by local employers, to the great extent (Karim, 2000).

Their need for income, and insufficient means to earn it, has led many refugees to sell portions of their food rations what is mentioned above as well. Host community is not welcoming them as well to work with them. Many local residents have become used to this trade and are not eager to see refugees afforded more income generating possibilities for fear that this source of food from the humanitarian aid will be diminished. Meanwhile WFP have launched basic self-reliance programmes in the camps, aimed at improving the status of vulnerable refugee children and families. Food for Work initiatives have provided much-needed supplementary food in return for labour on social works (WFP Bangladesh, 2020). UNHCR's interventions have been another example to protecting refugees against such harsh penalties but in the absence of lawful sources of income, refugees remain susceptible to the abuse by local businessman, camp personnel and local residents (UNHCR, 2018). A broad package of vocational training and self-reliance programmes engaging all relevant actors including the Government, is required if the long term self-sufficiency of the refugee population is to be achieved.

Bangladesh is making every effort in a professional fashion to harness regional and global power to end in amicable solution of this emerging crisis despite the position of China and India on the side of Myanmar on Rohingya issue. We have noticed both countries are having huge strategic and economic interest in Myanmar. Though Myanmar holds no major importance in Russian policy – no geopolitical interests are at stake there, while Moscow's attitude to the issue in the UN could potentially to upset its Muslim allies, for instance Iran. Unexpectedly, At least 1,300 Rohingya Muslims had crossed into Bangladesh from India since the beginning of this year as fears of deportation to Myanmar spark an exodus (Islam, 2019). New Delhi has faced sharp criticism for turning members of the persecuted minority over to Myanmar despite the army there being accused of atrocities against the Rohingya.

The Bangladesh government has been making diplomatic efforts in persuading Myanmar to repatriate the refugees over the months but in reality, it is highly unlikely the Bangladesh government will succeed in sending the refugees back to Myanmar in a shortest possible time. Myanmar and Bangladesh agreed in late 2017 to complete the return of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees within two years, notwithstanding international doubts that they will be held in forbidding detention camps that may result in another round of cruelty both physically and psychologically (UNHCR, 2019).

3. Conclusion

Considering the gravity of sufferings Rohingya refugees face, humanitarian, political, law and order, security, development and

environmental concerns must be prioritized rethinking different phases of enforcement. The international community is working closely with the Government of Bangladesh and Myanmar respectively to assist them in working towards voluntary, safe and dignified returns. They believe, only harmonious returns can break the decades-long cycle of displacement Rohingya community is experiencing. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2018 between the Government of Myanmar, UNHCR and UNDP is intended to ensure that refugees receive information on the situation in their places of origin and this MoU keeps a provision allowing Rohingya refugees to visit their home villages and other areas where they may choose to return. It also stands for extending transit facilities in Myanmar.

The Rohingya influx has placed on the host communities an extraordinary burden, compounded by the fact that these areas were already confronted with formidable challenges associated with relatively weak socio-economic development. Impacts have been particularly related to a fall in daily wages for labourers and extremely adverse impacts on public services and the environment. While emergency support was quick to arrive, long-term continual support is essential, particularly in view of the uncertain length of stay of the Rohingya refugees. UN agencies, international and national NGOs and government bodies are in a collective effort aiming at delivering protection to refugee women, men, girls and boys, provide life-saving assistance and foster social cohesion. If this problem lingers for a longer time, it may encourage creating pockets of radicalism and that may create problems of uncertainty and instability not only for Myanmar and Bangladesh but for the entire region. Hence, allowing Rohingya to go back to their place of origin in Myanmar with freedom of movement and other basic human rights would be the best way of showing respect to human rights, we believe.

We are looking forward to the successful repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar and enable them to have access to different dimensions of human security. United Nations, which is found to be very emphatic for meaningful repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh must coordinate and communicate with donors and other relevant stakeholders to come forward to solve this problem permanently by putting pressure on the Myanmar government to take back its citizens by creating a safe and secured environment. We request countries in this region and beyond to show solidarity with Bangladesh and to support Myanmar to start creating conditions for voluntary, safe and dignified return of Rohingya refugee.

There has been right around a political halt among Dhaka and Naypyidaw since the bombed repatriation offer in November 2018. The correspondence channels are about shut with shared allegations on

numerous issues, including pardons for postponing repatriation of the Rohingya. Thus, Dhaka isn't responsible for the Rohingya issue in spite of the fact that it keeps on paying an overwhelming cost from numerous points of view. Discretion, exchange and customary contacts ought to be useful to create regular justification for repatriation that may break the stop.

The Rohingya living in camps must be heard and counseled. Alleviation and restoration are insufficient; there ought to be approaches to investigate and oblige the necessities of the Rohingya as far as their yearnings, the fate of the kids just as their instruction and work both in the short-and long haul settings, including those of the host networks. This will require meeting, powerful correspondence and commitment with the Rohingya in all issues identified with the camps and camp administration. Further, the Rohingya ought to be viewed as partners in any worldwide discourses for movement and repatriation.

Bangladesh and the universal network should put weight on Myanmar to make vital conditions in Rakhine for the repatriation of the Rohingya. There are unexpected dangers related with deferrals and playing with the Rohingya issue. As of late, Bangladesh raised the issue at a global discussion in China to a great extent to look for Chinese and other Asian countries' inclusion to determine the emergency for territorial harmony and steadiness. The universal network must understand the potential security dangers that an extended emergency presents except if it is settled by convincing Myanmar to reclaim its uprooted nationals from Bangladesh. The Rohingya emergency requires crisp aggregate activity by all harmony cherishing nations. Korea can assume a significant job in putting a conclusion to this catastrophe by showing initiative in setting up discourses to locate a political answer for the Rohingya displaced people. While the arrangement is being looked for, it is likewise significant that financing and bolster proceed for the exiles and the neighborhood network in Bangladesh, so the outcasts can be secured and live with respect.

We urge upon the Government of Myanmar to take urgent action to address the root causes of the crisis which have persisted for decades, so that people are no longer forced to flee and the refugees can eventually return home in safety and dignity. UN at the same time must enforce the recommendation of Annan Commission by imposing diplomatic force on Myanmar. In this regard, UN Security Council must bring the resolution to facilitate the investigation on violation of human rights and thus ensure an international supervision for safe repatriation as well as initiate a visit to the Rohingya refugee camps by the Security Council again to force the government of Myanmar for setting up "safe zones" for people of all backgrounds in conflict-torn parts of Myanmar as proposed by our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

What we have seen following the recent past visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recent to China, China has assured to accelerate repatriation of Rohingya nationals, from Bangladesh to Myanmar putting pressure on Myanmar government. China has always considered an immediate solution to the problem and assured to do whatever is required from their side. Bangladesh government should also keep its efforts continue to encourage other governments to stay engaged and continue to address the pressing needs of these refugees -- needs that will only grow as long as this situation remains unresolved. We also urge for the repatriation of Rohingya people to Myanmar in a secured environment where they will not be haunted by the fear of persecution again.

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