

Perspectives in Social Work



College of Social Work (Autonomous),
Nirmala Niketan
Mumbai

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- Work with a preferential option for the vulnerable and exploited, both locally and globally.
- Build cadre of young, competent professionals having a global perspective and a strong value base of compassion, personal integrity, moderation, tolerance and self-respect.

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Contents

Editorial

1. Exploring the Gendered Experiences of
School Teachers in Delhi01
- Saloni Kumar and Meenu Sharma
2. Promoting Sustainable Rural Entrepreneurship
Among Kathkari Women in Mangaon,
Raigad District 21
- Mr. Cletus Zuzarte
3. Role of Social Participation and Civic
Engagement in Building Resilience: A study
Among Adolescents in Disadvantaged
Communities46
- Dr. Treesa T Pulickal
4. Rural Libraries as Places for Women
Empowerment in Assam61
- Barasha Sarma and Madhusmita Kalita
5. Teaching Critical Perspectives: A Praxis
Framework in Social Work Education
and Practice83
- Pradeep Jare and Jaimon Varghese
6. Breaking Barriers: Examining the Effects of
Dysfunctional ICDS Management on
Anganwadi Workers' Efficiency in Gujarat104
- Rakesh M. Gandhi and Prof. (Dr.) S. D. Mishra

EDITORIAL

In times marked by uncertainty and rapid change, social work professionals are called upon to reflect, innovate, and respond with resilience. These challenging circumstances demand not only the sharing of knowledge and experience, but also critical engagement with new methods of intervention and practice. The ability to adapt creatively and face instability with strength has become essential for today's social work practitioners. In this issue of Perspectives in Social Work, six contributors spanning researchers, practitioners, and educators offer valuable insights through their research, field experiences, and reflections. Together, their contributions enrich the discourse on how social work can remain responsive and impactful in the face of ongoing and emerging challenges.

The first article by Saloni Kumar and Meenu Sharma titled "*Exploring the Gendered Experiences of School Teachers in Delhi*" investigates how gender influences the professional experiences of teachers in private schools. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with selected male and female teachers in Delhi, the study brings out three major themes around gendered roles, career advancement, and workplace dynamics. The findings reveal that female teachers often face stereotypes, limited leadership opportunities, and structural biases, reinforcing the pink-collar label. In contrast, male teachers, though fewer in number, frequently benefit from quicker promotions and positive visibility. Interestingly, both male and female teachers adopt strategies to navigate and resist traditional gender roles within the profession. The paper concludes with a discussion on gendered challenges and highlights the need for inclusive policies and institutional support to promote equality in the education sector.

The second article by Mr. Cletus Zuzarte, titled “*Promoting Sustainable Rural Entrepreneurship among Kathkari Women in Mangaon, Raigad District*”, explores how tribal women engage with social entrepreneurship through SHGs. Drawing from case studies in Talegaon and Rudravali villages, the study highlights the role of the SVD Model in enabling livelihood development despite challenges like limited finance and market access. It emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity and support systems. The paper concludes with insights on fostering inclusive growth in subsistence marketplaces through social work interventions.

The third article by Dr. Treesa T Pulickal, titled “*Role of Social Participation and Civic Engagement in Building Resilience: A Study among Adolescents in Disadvantaged Communities*”, explores how civic involvement contributes to adolescent resilience. Conducted in three disadvantaged communities in Kerala, the qualitative study involved 24 adolescents aged 15–19 through interviews and FGDs. Findings revealed themes such as skill development, external exposure, stigma, and lack of mentors. The study highlights how meaningful participation strengthens resilience despite limited resources. It concludes with a call to enhance social support systems and stakeholder involvement to foster adolescent development through civic and social engagement initiatives.

The fourth article by Barasha Sarma and Madhusmita Kalita, titled “*Rural Libraries as Places for Women Empowerment in Assam*”, explores how rural public libraries can serve as community hubs to meet women's diverse information needs ranging from education and health to livelihood and governance. Through content analysis of 44 Scopus-indexed articles, the study identifies socio-economic and cultural factors influencing women's empowerment in Assam.

Despite their potential, rural libraries face challenges like poor infrastructure, limited ICT access, and lack of trained staff. The authors recommend immediate government intervention to strengthen rural libraries as inclusive spaces that foster gender equality and social development.

The fifth article by Pradeep Jare and Jaimon Varghese, titled *“Teaching Critical Perspectives: A Praxis Framework in Social Work Education and Practice”*, explores the significance of integrating critical theories into social work education to cultivate critical consciousness among students. The paper reflects on the tensions between conventional and progressive approaches in the discipline and argues for a transformative pedagogy that goes beyond structured curricula. By adopting a praxis-oriented framework, the authors emphasize the role of educators in not just imparting knowledge but actively challenging dominant narratives and encouraging students to critically engage with social realities. The paper calls for innovative, reflective teaching methods that equip future social workers with the tools to question, analyze, and act in the face of systemic inequality and oppression.

The sixth article by Rakesh M. Gandhi and Prof. (Dr.) S. D. Mishra, titled *“Breaking Barriers: Examining the Effects of Dysfunctional ICDS Management on Anganwadi Workers' Efficiency in Gujarat”*, investigates how systemic and operational issues within the ICDS scheme affect Anganwadi Workers' efficiency. Based on structured interviews with 370 AWWs across five zones of Gujarat, the study reveals challenges such as workload pressure, delayed salaries, inadequate infrastructure, low digital literacy, and lack of administrative support. The findings highlight how these dysfunctions undermine worker morale and service quality. The authors recommend infrastructure upgrades, policy reforms, and stronger community engagement to support AWWs and improve ICDS outcomes.

Perspectives in Social Work continues to serve as a vital platform for sharing research, reflections, and critical dialogue in the field of social work. This edition furthers the journal's commitment to deepening theoretical insights, influencing policy directions, and strengthening practice. By featuring diverse voices and innovative approaches, especially in times of uncertainty, the journal upholds its role in fostering thought leadership and encouraging transformative action across the social work profession.

Editorial Team

EXPLORING THE GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL TEACHERS IN DELHI

Saloni Kumar¹, Meenu Sharma²

Abstract

The teaching profession is categorized as having a pink collar due to the stereotype that women dominate it. This gendered perception of the profession often influences the experiences of both male and female teachers, shaping their professional identities, career progression, and work environments. Through a qualitative research approach, this study delves into the distinct challenges and opportunities faced by male and female teachers in school settings, shedding light on the interplay of gender dynamics within the profession. The study employed a purposive sampling approach to select participants from private schools in Delhi. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather rich and detailed accounts of the participants' experiences. The interviews focused on topics such as career advancement opportunities, support networks, mentorship, biases, and workplace dynamics. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the interview data, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and perspectives related to gender inequality within the teaching profession. For female teachers, the study uncovers biases, gender stereotypes, and limited opportunities for career advancement, which contribute to the perpetuation of the pink-collar perception of the profession. The glass escalator concept further enriches the analysis by investigating the potential disparities in career advancement within the teaching

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profession. Despite being in the minority, male teachers may experience accelerated career growth and preferential treatment, potentially accessing higher positions and leadership roles more rapidly than their female counterparts. Both male and female teachers employ various strategies to navigate these gendered experiences. Female teachers seek to challenge the pink-collar status, advocating for recognition, equal opportunities, and improved work conditions. On the other hand, male teachers strive to break free from traditional gender roles, emphasizing their dedication to teaching and embracing nurturing aspects of the profession. The findings of this study have important implications for educational institutions and policymakers. Recognizing male and female teachers' unique challenges and addressing the gendered challenges can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive teaching profession.

Keywords: Teaching profession, Gender, Leadership, Glass Escalator Effect

Introduction

Imagine a school teacher teaching preschoolers and kindergarteners. Caring for the children, looking after their emotional needs, requiring them to practice writing or reciting poetry, or just playing along with them. There is a possibility that the first image that comes to our mind when we consider a school teacher is of a woman. Similarly, a quick search on Google Images for the term 'school teacher' reveals a significant number of images that feature women in the role of a teacher. At this point, it's worth questioning whether teaching in schools, particularly in India, is considered a profession primarily for women.

Prabhu (2021) notes that very few women were in the teaching profession in the early 1800s. In 1848, the establishment of the first girls' school by Savitri Bai and

Jyotirao Phule was a significant milestone in women's education. Their efforts paved the way for countless female students to pursue academic excellence. Female teachers became more prevalent in schools as more women completed their education. As India's economy flourished, male individuals shifted their focus from teaching to working in other better-paying fields.

India's recent school education landscape exhibits parallel tendencies. The Indian Ministry of Education (2022) issued a comprehensive report on the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) on school education. It was noted that on the country level, in 2018–19, the count of female teachers stood at 47.1 lakh, a figure that saw an increase to 48.77 lakh by 2021–22. Conversely, the cadre of male teachers amounted to 47.2 lakh in 2018–19, experiencing a decline to 46.3 lakh by 2021–22. Female teachers continue to outnumber male teachers, especially at the pre-primary or primary levels.

Nonetheless, when shifting the focus to the upper primary level and beyond, there is a reversal, indicating a greater presence of male teachers compared to their female counterparts. The data indicate that although men enter the teaching profession, the proportion is not evenly distributed. But what causes the lower percentage of male representation in teaching, especially in elementary education?

Certain preconceived notions are associated with the teaching profession. Teaching has long been viewed as a comfortable job with predictable tasks. Thus, due to its seemingly fixed work hours and work-life balance, teaching is frequently regarded as the ideal profession for women. It is expected that women will be able to work outside the home and earn a living without giving up their traditional roles as caregivers and homemakers. Additionally, schools favour

female teachers because of their perceived nurturing qualities. On the contrary, the perception that teaching in institutions of higher learning is more prestigious and lucrative leads to a disproportionate number of males working in higher education (Prabhu, 2021).

The overrepresentation of women in certain school teaching positions has resulted in a feminization of the teaching profession. Occupations that have been associated with women are known as pink-collar jobs. School teaching has emerged as one such example of an occupation. While the term pink collar may accurately describe the large percentage of female workers in a given industry, it also carries with it a set of preconceived notions and biases that affect workplace dynamics. This gendered perception of the profession often influences the experiences of both male and female teachers, shaping their professional identities, career progression, and work environments. While there has been considerable research on the effects of this gender bias on students, there seems to be less attention given to how this bias affects male and female teachers. Thus, through a qualitative research approach, this study delves into the distinct challenges and opportunities faced by male and female teachers in school settings, shedding light on the interplay of gender dynamics within the profession.

Methodology

This research paper is situated in an interpretivist paradigm and views reality as subjective. It is believed in interpretative research that reality is socially constructed. It tries to understand reality in a particular context (Willis, 2007). This paradigm is best suited to this study because it tries to uncover the reality of a particular context in a specific profession. Since interpretative research tries to work on open-ended research questions, the research works on qualitative data. Similarly, qualitative methodology is used in this study.

The research questions of this study are: -

1. What impact does gender have on working as a teacher?
2. Are there any observed differences in the opportunities and challenges for career growth between male and female teachers?

Sampling

Twenty-four teachers from four private-unaided schools in Delhi were the sample for this study. The researchers deliberately gathered data from private, unaided schools in Delhi, India. This choice was based on the fact that private schools operate differently from government schools, with varying management structures and levels of autonomy. By focusing on this particular context, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender biases and perceptions manifest in the relatively independent environment of private schools, offering valuable insights into societal norms and role expectations. Also, this narrowed scope of research helped the researchers conduct a more focused analysis.

According to the Ministry of Education (2022), there is a significant gender disparity in employment among private, unaided schools in Delhi. Only 40 male teachers are at the pre-primary level, compared to 5,236 female teachers. There are 1,985 male and 24,400 female teachers at the primary level. At the upper primary level, there are 1,795 male teachers and 11,611 female teachers. Given the predominantly female composition of the teaching workforce in these schools, identifying male participants for the study proved formidable. The researchers had to leverage personal networks to overcome these challenges and ensure a representative sample of male teachers, thus contributing to a comprehensive exploration of gender dynamics within the teaching profession. Thus, both male and female teachers

from each school were chosen to provide insights into gender dynamics and variations in the teaching profession. This article only refers to male and female teachers because the participants identified themselves in these two categories. However, we acknowledge that using the labels male and female implies a binary system of gender and does not include the diversity of gender identities.

Purposive sampling was used as a sampling strategy in this study to select the participants. The researchers purposely selected participants with more than five years of teaching experience.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as a tool for this study. Semi-structured interviews strike a balance between unstructured and structured approaches. Although they involve a predetermined set of questions or topics, they also offer the freedom to ask probing and follow-up questions. This flexibility empowers researchers to delve into insights and tailor the interview to each participant's distinct experiences.

Data Analysis

Data transcription was done after the interview and was analyzed thematically. For this, researchers read the transcription of the data several times to familiarise themselves with the data. Then, codes were assigned to the data segments that represented themes and patterns. These data segments were then categorized into broader themes regarding gender dynamics in teaching. These themes were then analyzed to interpret the meanings and understand the nuances between them. Findings are presented in a narrative format, supported by participant quotes to illustrate key themes and insights.

Interpretations and Analysis

Not my first choice: Choosing a career as a school teacher

Kundu and Basu (2022) note that men rarely choose teaching as a career path at an early stage. Status, pay, working in a primarily female setting, and regular engagement with children are all hypothesized as contributing factors for the male not choosing a career as a school teacher. In this study, teachers were questioned about their motivations for entering the teaching profession. A similar pattern emerged in which a significant number of male participants admitted that teaching was not their initial career choice. However, they remained in the profession because they enjoyed interacting directly with students and valued the nurturing role that teaching offered them.

Some male teachers noted,

"I started teaching so that it would give me time to prepare for competitive government exams, and I would earn side by side. But I enjoy teaching. I like how these children make me feel alive."

"Teaching did not come to me by default. I was clueless after graduation. Then, a friend suggested me to try teaching until I discover something better for myself. It has been seven years, and I enjoy my role as a teacher. I can see how I can impact the lives of the children. The role is very fulfilling. Every day, there is a new challenge with children, and I enjoy working with them."

"I started teaching because I wanted a job to look after my family, and I had a degree in education, so I thought to myself, why not teach until I get something else figured out? But now I like teaching, and the stigma that was there in me, that only women can become good teachers, because they have this quality of nurturing and caring by birth, has now changed. I care equally about my students."

It was intriguing to find that none of the male educators desired to opt out of teaching due to the nurturing aspects intrinsic to the role or because of the women-dominated field. They openly embraced the nurturing dimension and highlighted it as a significant motivation for their dedication in the field. It was also interesting to observe how male teachers' preconceptions about teaching changed when they entered the profession.

Upon being interviewed, many female teachers revealed that their decision to pursue a career in education was made at a young age, while some also transitioned from the corporate sector to have more time to dedicate to domestic responsibilities. It is important to note that women are often restricted to jobs considered an extension of their domestic role, where they have no or limited interaction with men and in roles that are compatible with their family roles (Khan, 2011).

Some female teachers noted,

"Although my pay is less than in the corporate world, I like it here as I am able to devote much time at home to my children. But, in this job, you are able to see the results of your efforts every day, which I like as compared to corporates."

"From very early on, I was told to be a teacher. It is a very respectable profession, especially for girls. I have grown to like this profession. I also like how this profession challenges you every day in its unique way."

To some extent, the reasons for continuing teaching as a career have been similar for both genders, such as getting satisfaction from teaching or contributing to society by providing the right kind of education to children and imparting knowledge. However, male teachers agree that external motivators such as salary and employment are more influential (Konrad et al., 2000). In the narratives, we saw

how male teachers joined this profession to attain financial security and because it gave the participants the time to work on other opportunities, too. In contrast, female teachers were indoctrinated from a young age that teaching was the perfect profession for them and that it would also allow them more time in the domestic sphere.

We have been pigeonholed into specific roles.

In schools, teachers have diverse responsibilities to ensure that their students receive a holistic education. However, traditional gender roles persist in allocating responsibilities for male and female teachers. In many instances, male teachers are viewed as the authoritative figure in the classroom and are responsible for maintaining order and discipline or are called when manual labour is demanded (Cruickshank et al., 2019). Female teachers are similarly given tasks that are more related to organizing or planning school events, collaboration activities, or tasks related to classroom aesthetics. In this study, researchers found that every teacher interviewed shared the same worries.

Male teachers noted,

"No one has told us directly, like there were no explicit instructions, yet all the male teachers are expected to look after the chairs, bring chairs from the nearby classes, or ensure proper seating arrangement whenever there is an event. While female teachers are engrossed with anchoring the event, decorating the stage, etc."

"I have noticed that male teachers are always given the most notorious classes, and we are even called when some students fight between themselves. Male teachers are given bus duties, lunch break duties, and taking up sports with students."

"I have seen that male teachers are not considered sensitive enough, and parents' expectations are also

different from those of male and female teachers. Even though I am a class teacher, parents tend to discuss their children's issues with other subject teachers because they are female. In PTMs, too, parents generally talk to me about how I can discipline their child. They assume that male teachers are not sensitive and are only appropriate for discipline and control."

Female teachers noted,

"Male teachers are never given the reception desk duties; it is always the females who are kept for reception desk tasks. Why do they believe that male teachers won't be able to communicate properly? Or are female teachers inherently good at greeting and doing nonsensical paperwork?"

"It is always us females who are given tasks of conducting storytelling, craft sessions, or dance sessions for students. We are always expected to come up with some sort of co-curricular activity for students. I have not seen any initiation from male teachers, and if they are not doing it, that is no big deal with the higher-ups."

The responses from the teachers indicate that both male and female teachers are expected to conform to traditional norms and stereotypes. Nonetheless, every teacher interviewed was actively considering the gendered expectations placed upon them in schools. Both genders vehemently questioned the legitimacy of these gendered expectations. The researchers believe that this reflection is a step towards upward progression. The researchers are optimistic that these stifling conventions will eventually be openly and critically discussed in school settings. This dialogue will enable both genders to reflect on their experiences and chart a progressive path forward that transcends gender-based expectations.

How am I supposed to behave as a male teacher?

There have always been challenges for men who want to become teachers. One such challenge is the pressure to be a role model, coupled with uncertainty regarding the qualities they are expected to embody (Allan, 1993). In the study, when teachers talked about their roles in the school, male teachers were observed to be more confused about their role as teachers and how they were actually supposed to behave with children.

Male teachers noted,

"Whenever someone notices me having a laugh in my class with the students, they say that I am too friendly for a male teacher or that I should be a little more strict; otherwise, students will start to disrespect me, but in the meetings and even in my teacher education courses we have been taught to make our students comfortable and that we should be their friend and guide rather than being an authoritarian figure. So, these comments make me doubt myself."

"I teach in a private school, and they keep you on probation in the first year. My teaching style is different from that of a traditional, strict teacher. I teach in a fun way, talk to my students regularly, and they discuss all kinds of things with me, but I have gotten feedback from my coordinators and fellow teachers that I should be focusing more on disciplining these children; otherwise, they will start making fun of me. Female teachers have also told me many times that students are more afraid of female teachers than me, which is not a good thing, according to them."

Through the narratives, it was visible that male teachers struggle to fit into the roles of the teachers, mainly because of

the confusion created by the stereotypical images of masculine and feminine traits as well as of the stereotypical roles of male teachers. Balchin (2002) and Ashley (2001) also talked about male teachers who cannot decide what to exemplify, the hegemonic masculine attributes typical of a particular culture or the nurturing, loving, "feminine" attributes.

I am less valued: Female teachers' participation in STEM subjects.

Studies have consistently indicated that girls tend to have lower self-efficacy in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) than boys (Fraillon et al. 2014). However, research has found that female teachers can positively impact girls' educational experiences and learning outcomes in certain situations (Unterhalter et al., 2014). By serving as positive role models and dispelling stereotypes about male superiority in STEM fields, female teachers can significantly influence girls' attitudes, engagement, and self-efficacy in STEM subjects (Baker 2013). Unfortunately, there is a noticeable gender gap in STEM education and employment in India, with just 14% of workers in STEM professions being women, according to the National Science Foundation's data from 2022. Upon interviewing teachers, the researchers discovered that female teachers received limited exposure, and male teachers predominantly made decisions regarding science-related activities.

Female teachers noted,

"I have observed this in my case; if activities or events are happening related to science or mathematics, like an exhibition or anything, my only role is to guide students about how to receive guests or what and when snacks will be provided. The male teachers take all the important decisions, and the irony is we are not even involved in the decision-making processes."

"I have been teaching in this school for 8-9 years. For the past five years, I have been taking elementary mathematics classes. I have also taught class 9th for the last two years, but they do not give me class 10th to teach. I have applied so many times for that, but they always give class 10th to male teachers even though my qualifications and experience are the same as other teachers. It clearly shows that they do not trust that a woman can teach mathematics well."

In the narratives, it's evident that there are lingering misconceptions about the capabilities of women in STEM fields, which continue to hinder their progress. These stereotypes can significantly impact female students' self-confidence and aspirations. Furthermore, the unequal distribution of responsibilities and decision-making power between male and female teachers is disconcerting. Collaborative decision-making should be standard practice within schools, including all educators' perspectives and expertise. This ensures a more comprehensive approach and promotes a sense of equity and respect among the teaching staff. Lastly, it's alarming that female teachers are sometimes denied opportunities to teach class 10th due to perceived risks and pressures. This bias restricts their career advancement and sends a discouraging message about their capabilities. Schools should proactively support and mentor female teachers, enabling them to thrive in all teaching assignments and ensuring that students benefit from a diverse range of educators.

Status and pay will make me opt out!

It was noted that both male and female teachers detest the low remuneration. They did not view private school teaching as a lucrative profession in the long run. They also mentioned that they are interested in switching to government schools

because of the increased job security and better remuneration. The research findings indicated that a majority of men proactively pursued a different career trajectory and were very vocal about their decision. This was primarily due to economic and social factors.

"We men have to provide for the family. Private schools do not pay you much. Job- security is also not there. I am trying to get into government schools. Let us see what would happen."

"Teaching is considered a noble profession, a profession that makes other professions. But people who say that don't actually mean it. If I crack the IAS exams, I, as a man, will earn more respect in society."

Due to low remuneration, working as a teacher in India can be difficult financially, especially in the private school sector. However, the responses indicate that male educators felt extra pressure, being the breadwinners in their families. These statements are indicative of strong gender stereotypes, where males seem to associate self-worth with financial success and societal status. While some female teachers aimed for higher remuneration, they did not seem to equate self-worth with salary. It was also noticed that none of the female teachers presented any arguments for the advancement of their social status, which could be due to the wider recognition society places on women in the teaching profession. This situation draws attention to the complicated relationship between societal expectations and personal motivations within the teaching profession. Female teachers find intrinsic motivation to continue in the field.

Men seem to be on a glass escalator.

According to William (1992, as cited in Congrad-Black, 2012), men's experiences in sex-atypical work may differ

from women's due to the social and cultural power associated with masculinity. Despite any potential disadvantages, men may receive rewards and advantages in typically "feminine jobs" that outweigh any negative experiences. William (1992, as cited in Congrad-Black, 2012) suggests that a "glass escalator" model exists in mostly female-dominated fields, where men are encouraged to climb to positions of authority. This model provides men with informal advantages over women. Conversely, women are more likely to experience career interruptions, particularly in teaching roles.

According to the study's findings, stereotypical bias and the lack of leadership opportunities for female teachers have hampered their ability to advance in their careers. Employers and administrators may perceive mothers or pregnant women as less dedicated to their work.

Female teachers shared

"Three years ago, there was an opening for a leadership position at my school. I applied for the position, but it was given to a male staff member who was not even part of the elementary department. I was told that since I was getting married in the next three months, I would have to take a lot of leave and, therefore, would not be able to handle the responsibility. The same thing happened this year also, and this time, the reason was my pregnancy."

"Last year, I was experiencing certain problems in my personal life, and I shared them with the administration to get the support I needed. I am in the process of separation from my husband, but I never let it affect my work. But unfortunately, I have been denied the position of Incharge because the school thinks I am not fit mentally for the added pressure and work."

It is also important to note that when researchers

talked to the female teachers working in primary or pre-primary grades, they shared that they generally have female leaders because there are hardly any male teachers in the primary section. It was visible in the narratives that in secondary and senior secondary grades, where the number of male teachers increased, they also got preference in the selection process for leadership and managerial positions.

A few teachers also discussed that the heads and management of the school are 90% men, most of the leadership positions are only given to male staff, and they also get preferential treatment in all kinds of work. Teachers also shared that in meetings, sexist jokes are related to female teachers. This finding can be corroborated with the concept of the "boys' club." The "boys' club" is a colloquial term that refers to an informal network or group of male colleagues, typically in leadership or influential positions within an organization, who often engage in social bonding, decision-making, and career advancement activities that exclude or marginalize female employees (Bates, 2016).

A female teacher shared,

"In the staff room, the male director addresses the three male faculty members more frequently than us. They often laugh at sexist jokes and seem to have a good time, creating an uncomfortable atmosphere for us despite our majority presence. It makes us feel inferior to them and perpetuates the feeling of exclusion."

This gender bias in leadership and the prevalence of a "boys' club" culture can harm the overall work environment, hindering collaboration, equality, and the professional growth of female teachers. Addressing these issues and promoting a more inclusive and respectful workplace for all educators is essential.

Implications of the Study

- Traditional gender roles in education must be challenged and dismantled to create an environment where both male and female teachers are valued for their abilities.
- Teacher training programs should incorporate components that specifically address the challenges related to stereotypical gender expectations of educators.
- Reflective discussions are essential for educators to address gender expectations and promote female representation in STEM fields.
- Schools should provide support systems to help teachers cope with role confusion and discrimination and foster spaces for reflective discussions among staff.
- Ensuring fair compensation and promoting female participation in STEM-related activities is crucial for attracting and retaining talented educators.
- Schools should also create equal leadership opportunities, ensuring that all qualified educators are considered. Schools must ensure that leadership positions are open to all qualified educators, regardless of gender or personal life status. Discrimination based on factors such as marriage, pregnancy, or other personal circumstances should not hinder career advancement for female teachers.
- Schools should proactively work to cultivate an inclusive and respectful school culture that discourages sexist attitudes and the formation of exclusive "boys club" mentalities among staff members.

To sum up, these implications highlight the critical role that academic institutions have in actively challenging and overcoming gender-based biases and expectations and promoting inclusion. Schools may establish a conducive environment that is advantageous to both teaching professionals and students by implementing these strategies and creating forums for educators to engage in reflective discussion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experiences of female teachers in the field of education highlight how traditional gender norms and stereotypes continue to exist within schools. Both men and women encounter expectations that pigeonhole them into roles. Male teachers, in particular, often find themselves navigating a balance between being friendly and maintaining authority. Some economic factors and societal pressures drive men to pursue teaching careers, even if it is not their choice. The issue of remuneration is a source of dissatisfaction, especially for male educators who bear the responsibility of being primary breadwinners. Gender discrimination persists in STEM education when it relates to leadership positions. This reflects deep-rooted biases. Men tend to benefit from the "glass escalator" effect in female-dominated professions, while women often face interruptions in their careers due to their gendered responsibilities. In some cases, sexist attitudes and male-dominated leadership exacerbate the challenges faced by female teachers. Addressing these issues and dismantling gender-based expectations are crucial to creating a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.

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**“PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE RURAL
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG KATHKARI
WOMEN IN MANGAON, RAIGAD DISTRICT”**

***“Lessons learnt by tribal women through SHG promoted
Social Entrepreneurship Initiatives”***

Mr. Cletus Zuzarte¹

Abstract

Women in India constitute over 48% of the population, and their contribution to the economy is vital for sustainable growth. As entrepreneurs, women have the potential to transform families, communities, and the broader economic landscape. India's vibrant entrepreneurial environment has been bolstered by government initiatives and supportive policies, creating opportunities for women to realize their aspirations. This research explores the entrepreneurial initiatives of tribal Kathkari women and examines whether SHGs, NGOs, or CSR activities in rural areas have provided a conducive ecosystem for their progress—particularly in sourcing funds, gaining expertise, and accessing markets. It emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that respects cultural sensitivities and enhances financial access. Using the NGO Sarva Vikas Deep (SVD) Model for livelihood development, the study recognizes that Kathkari women possess inherent capacities but face challenges like limited finance, process knowledge, and marketing support. Insights from two case studies—Khamjai SHG women from Talegaon and Savitri Vikas SHG women from Rudravali village in Maharashtra—illustrate their steady progress and increased confidence in entrepreneurial pursuits. A key takeaway is that the tribal mindset, rooted in resourcefulness and resilience, should be viewed positively.

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Understanding the dynamics between social entrepreneurship and inclusive growth in subsistence markets is crucial. A supportive framework, rooted in cultural sensitivity and tailored interventions, can help tribal women leverage their strengths and contribute meaningfully to economic development.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Kathkari Tribal Women, Livelihood Opportunities, SHGs, Entrepreneurial Eco-System, Sustainable Initiatives

Introduction:

Women in India consist of over 48 percent of India's population, their valuable contribution to the growing economy needs to be taken into account as they can become the key players when it comes to change in the family, society, and of course making it count when it comes to economic growth. The call for the emerging women entrepreneur puts the emphasis on making sure that the number of women in the labour force is counted in and their presence acknowledged. This parity can visibly add to the Gross Domestic Product of a developing country like India by over 27 percent.

According to Rana Kapoor (2018), "in order to foster inclusive growth, we must work towards ensuring that at least 25 percent of entrepreneurs are women by 2025". It is impossible to think of economic growth without women as the fundamental drivers of change. According to her 'it is projected that by 2025, India's GDP will get an additional boost of 16 percent, by integrating women into the workforce'. The theme of the 8th edition of Global Entrepreneurship Summit, 'Women First, Prosperity for all' highlighted the growing acknowledgment that when women do better, countries do better. As professional entrepreneurs, women get a chance to actualize their dreams. India has

developed as a vibrant entrepreneurial landscape aided by several progressive initiatives and measures instituted by the government.

Today, with more than 20,000 start-ups, India has emerged as the second-largest start-up ecosystem in the world and is expected to grow at 10-12 percent year-on-year. It is indeed heartening to see that India jumped 50 places in the overall 'Ease of Doing Business' rankings and this is just another reason to keep ploughing ahead full steam towards ensuring an equal level playing field for women leadership in the country. According to the Sixth Economic Census by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), only 14 percent of businesses in India are run by women. It is estimated that over 90 percent of the finance required for women entrepreneurs is met through informal channels since they are unable to source formal, collateral-free, and transparent financing for their enterprises.

This is further validated by the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2018 (MIWE) which observed that cultural bias and a lack of access to financial services were amongst the major hindrances for women business owners in India. Therefore, there is an urgent need to create an enabling environment for women to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations through progressive policies.

This research paper seeks answers to several questions. What has been the context of tribal Kathkari Women's initiatives? Have their dogged attempts to enter into the Entrepreneurship arena been possible? Have SHGs, existing NGOs, or other corporate CSR initiatives in the rural areas provided an avenue, a supportive ecosystem for tribal women to source funds or expertise? What kind of enabling environment can foster cultural sensitivity and financial access? Do NGO - facilitated SHGs have the key to develop such an eco-system for Kathkari tribals? It is imperative to

examine the ecosystems for entrepreneurship that can enable Kathkari tribal women to start entrepreneurship initiatives and make a mark in this scenario.

Kathkari Tribals – the most marginalized group of Tribals in Maharashtra:

As per Heredia and Srivastava (1994), “the Kathkaris are one of the most marginalized communities of India, being designated as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)' within the Scheduled Tribes”. They are geographically spread out in the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra with a greater presence in the Raigad District of Maharashtra. The tribal communities in Raigad district consist of three tribes, Thakur, Mahadev-Koli, and Kathkari. Out of these three as per the 1991 Census, the Kathkaris are the highest in terms of their numerical strength. The total ST population in Raigad district as per the 1991 Census is 2,33,953. The 2001 Census reports marginal rise in the population of Scheduled Tribes in Raigad 2,69,124.

As per the Census Survey in 2011 the total population of Raigad district is 26,34,200, out of which 2,69,124 are tribals, known as Kathkaris, Warlis, Thakurs, and others. The districts of Ratnagiri, Pune, Nashik, Raigad and Thane together account for around 96 % of the Kathkari population with Raigad having the highest i.e. 43.4 % of the tribal population. According to the 2009 Census data, Khalapur and Mangaon are the two blocks with the highest Kathkari population, ranging from 12 to 14 thousand.

S.N.	District Name	Population Percentage
1	Raigad	43.34
2	Thane	32.91
3	Ratnagiri	12.12
4	Pune	5.09
5	Nashik	2.55
6	Others	3.99
	Total	100

Table 1: Source - Census 2011

For this study on Women Entrepreneurs as a researcher, I have focused on Mangaon block/taluka which has a population of 1,52,270 out of which about 10,733 are tribals belonging to the Kathkari tribe (14.1%). There are 185 revenue villages in the taluka. Among the tribals 50% of men and 29% of women are literate. In the district, a total of 40,456 tribal families are below the poverty line (BPL) out of which 2,964 families in Mangaon taluka are BPL and landless agricultural labourers. Among the 85 tribes in Maharashtra, the Kathkaris are considered to be the most backward tribe, formerly known as 'primitive tribe'. The Kathkari tribals live in geographical clusters of dwellings commonly called hamlets which are located at the foothills and hilly slopes of the area. Like most primitive nomadic tribes, Kathkaris dwelt in the forests and lived off its produce. "The British bracketed Katkaris as Criminal Tribes and also took some nominal measures of encouraging settled life for Katkaris through providing forest land on lease for cultivation". (Heredia, Srivastava 1994). One of the main causes of their backwardness being their landlessness.

The tribals are known to identify with land, water, and forest, and all these three have been taken away from them. Only a marginal few Kathkaris (0.5%) own fragments of land that range from less than 2 to 5 gunthas which they obtained through the government authorities in the last 20 to 40 years. As industrialization grew from the 1970s the Kathkaris were the hardest hit and further pushed to the margins of society. The forests and the natural resources which were their main sources of livelihood were gradually getting depleted. As a result, their very identity was being eroded. Their growing insecurities have been captured by Milind Bokil, an activist and scholar in the TISS consultation report shared by Waghmare and Jojo in 2014. Out of the various insecurities quoted namely tenure insecurity, existential insecurity, knowledge insecurity, social & psychological insecurity;

livelihood insecurity captures their sense of loss, which is a loss of access and control over natural resources, traditionally harnessed – coupled with a lack of alternate options (assured wage labour and employment).

Why focus on Kathkari Women?

According to Waghmare and Jojo (2014) Kathkari women “besides taking care of domestic labour activities within the household, also contribute extensively through their labour to the economy” which results in them having “multiple burdens and sustained resistance”. The tribals are married off even before they reach adulthood, “early married couples generally proceed to work as contracted couples on brick kilns, however, it is to be noted that Kathkari women are paid equally on farms as they do the same amount of work as the men”. Besides working in brick kilns, some women augment their income by collecting minor produces from the forest for consumption and sale. The study survey findings of Waghmare and Jojo(2014) indicate that men head 82.3% households, while women, mostly widowed, head 16% households.

Many NGOs have been working with the Kathkaris, attempting to resolve the livelihood issues faced by them during a major part of the year i.e. from October to practically the end of May, when they migrate in search of alternative livelihood to sustain their families. Migration has also affected the children who migrate along with them resulting in disruptions of their learning patterns or sometimes a complete drop out of the education system. Women who have a major role to play in the family could also ensure that their children attend school. Hence it is imperative to look at how Kathkari women could undertake alternative forms of livelihood and perhaps new initiatives in entrepreneurship which would lead them to become path-breakers in changing the mould of the kathkari tribal society.

Sarva Vikas Deep (SVD) a registered NGO has been working to address the social issues of the Kathkaris from 2006 onwards in 89 tribal hamlets of Mangaon taluka. Their Vision is to build “An Empowered Self Reliant and United Society”. One of their main objectives has been “to empower women through education and leading them through a process to build on sustainable livelihood initiatives”. They have been able to study the seasonal distress migration taking place and arrest the migration rate by creating opportunities for livelihood through group farming, goat rearing, fishery cooperatives, group brick kilns, vocational training, and building a sustainable system to generate income from traditional skills of the tribals through both agricultural and non-agricultural options. For the purpose of this research paper, I have visited and interacted with Kathkari tribal SHG women from two villages, Talegaon and Rudravali. The findings of my discussions will be presented in the proceeding part of this article.

The current types of livelihoods undertaken by Kathkari Tribal Women

“Kathkaris are a largely landless tribe who depend on agricultural and non-agricultural labour to meet their ends” (Waghmare, Jojo 2014). According to Srivastava and Heredia, most of the Kathkari tribals are landless (around 85%). Amongst the Kathkaris, those who own agricultural land, 46 percent have land holdings of less than one-acre size and 24 percent have landholding between 1-2 acres. Only 6 percent of Kathkaris are cultivators (Census 2001). Traditionally, they have been rice cultivators and continue to do so in their small patches of lands, or on land leased from others. The only livelihood known to Kathkaris is to work as agricultural labourers on the farms of the Marathas.

Around 93.4% of Kathkari households in the survey undertaken by Waghmare and Jojo in 2014 indicate that their

major livelihood is either Manual Labor (where they casually work for others in return get daily wages - around 60 percent workers work as migrant labourers in brick kilns, woodcutting and coal making. The “migrant works that Katkaris are involved is of semi-bonded nature, elements of these works fit the description of bonded labour”. The brick kiln owners taking advantage of their situation offer them easy loans to meet their daily needs and to celebrate occasions like Holi and weddings, making them indebted and reducing them literally to bonded labour. "Apart from migrating for seeking livelihood opportunities in the agricultural off-season, many a time it is also to earn money to pay off loans, which in turn are lent by brick-kiln owners or contractors. Also, a considerable number of loans are taken to spend during festivities like Holi, Ganpati/Diwali, or for occasions like marriages, or in the Jatra (village fair) and very less for agricultural/medical reasons” (Dwivedi 2017). This annual ritual of migration is more pronounced in the talukas of south Raigad for example, Mahad, Mhasla, compared to the talukas like Panvel, Karjat, Alibag, in north Raigad. This is also due to water scarcity in that region during summer. The few Kathkaris left along with the elders engage in vegetable cultivation or collecting forest products like wood, cashew, herbs and fruits,

Another unpublished research study entitled “Kathkaris of Raigad Speak” undertaken by Dr. Anthony Dias of Xavier Institute of Social Research (XISR) in 2009, attempted to understand the situation of Kathkari tribals. Out of a total of 646, Kathkaris interviewed, 258 were migrants (39.9%). The research found that 88% migrated because of economic reasons as they needed money to fulfill their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. Often the brick kiln contractors come with their vehicles and pick up the tribals from the village hamlets itself. This was affirmed by 77% of the teachers and social workers from the 18 organizations who

work for the Kathkaris. 53% of the Kathkaris interviewed, said that the brick kiln contractors freely disbursed loans to them thus trapping them in a web of repaying these loans.

The study also sheds light on the difficulties and challenges faced by tribals when they migrate to brick kilns as 54.7% spoke of the insecurities that they faced in terms of the physical and sexual violence they encounter, while 26% spoke about the work exploitation such as long hours of work, bad working conditions, lack of access to health facilities, lack of education opportunities for their children and 48% clearly expressed that their basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter were not met. Upon returning back to their villages they faced a host of other problems like the poor state of their houses, their children's education, health-related issues, as well as conflicts in the village.

There are many benefits of migrating for livelihood. The ready availability of money for various social occasions like Holi and weddings was one of the main reasons expressed by 79.1% of the tribals. Around 34.9% of tribals also expressed the good treatment that they received from their employers. The Kathkaris being nomadic by nature, 35% expressed their wish to migrate and around 3% specifically mentioned that this flowed from a desire to wander and be free.

The Kathkaris from Rudravali village do not own any land. The only livelihood they know of is that of being agricultural labourers in the fields of the Marathas during the agricultural season. After October most of the women in the hamlet especially some of the women from the *Savitri Vikas Mahila Bachat Ghat* (SVMBG) migrate to Kolhans which are located in Hyderabad. The tribals are given loans by the malaks (owners). One of the women 'Sangeeta' was given a sum of 2 lakhs as a loan to build her house a year back. She is yet to repay the loan hence this year too she and her family will have to migrate and work in Kolhans and repay the

loan. They are paid Rs. 100 to 110 for a bag of coal. The owner provides the wood and they have to prepare the coal.

The Khamjai SHG from Talegaon, Mangaon Taluka was started in 2012. The women meet regularly and have utilized their interloan facilities to further their agricultural needs. Initially, the women took up joint cooperative farming in the last two years after they were motivated by SVD field staff in the '*vichar manthan baithak*' to explore the possibility of taking up cultivation as a sustainable means of livelihood. The women attend the monthly SHG Federation meetings where they get inputs on various topics that range from how to run their SHGs to getting their due entitlements and how to engage in sustainable livelihood endeavors. Listening to the success stories of *Haladi* cultivation, the SHG women visited the SHG at Manjrone village and learned the possible ways in which they could take up similar cultivation. They came back and discussed their learnings with their family members who supported their desire to take up the possible venture in *Haladi* cultivation. Through this initial experience, they have not had a very good profit in fact they were barely able to break even with the expenses that they incurred.

The Khamjai SHG women from Talegaon village then took up Rice Cultivation in the monsoon and the summer on a three-acre plot which was taken on lease from one of the Maratha families. As per the agreement, it was decided that one-fourth of the produce would be given to them as rent. The cultivation was taken up during the summer as water from the nearby canal is available. The crop yield was four bags consisting of 40 kgs each. Each woman got a profit of Rs. 1300/- from the sale. The paddy was sold at Rs. 15 per kg, 1200/- per quintal resulting in a sale of Rs. 12,000/-. The crop was sold to local traders from Mangaon. The women owe the success of this venture to the support provided by the family. One of the major challenges faced by the women has been

the absence of proper fencing resulting in stray cows entering the field to eat the crops. Hence in order to mitigate this problem, this year the women have decided to first attend to the question of putting up a good fence. Another challenge shared by the women has been the high transport charges paid to the transport service providers.

The Khamjai SHG women from Talegaon village and Savitri Vikas SHG women from Rudravali village had explored other livelihood initiatives too, e.g. in 2013 they took up 'goat rearing' where through *Swades Foundation* they got 3 goats, one big and two small goats. They had to purchase one goat for the sum of Rs. 1600/-. These goats did not survive as they were obtained from Osmanabad and could not survive in the climatic conditions of Raigad.

The major resource the women have is their willingness to work hard, as they do not own any land. The only land they have is the homestead land. Earlier the only other sources of livelihood have been their efforts to collect firewood and cultivation of Nachni and Vari on small pieces of forest land.

Possible livelihood opportunities that can be undertaken in the available context.

The Kathkaris being a primitive forest-dwelling tribe earlier relied on the resources obtained from the forest. However now being relegated to the fringes of the forest and having limited access to forest produce because of government limitations placed on them, they have reduced their reliance on earlier known livelihood options like collecting firewood and non-timber products like fruits, nuts, vegetables, and roots. They have limited themselves to growing vegetables in open grazing lands as per the availability of water sources and have now made themselves available to work as agricultural labourers on the agricultural lands of the dominant communities like the Marathas and Kunbis.

The Kathkaris were also known to cultivate 'Nachni and Vari' along with 'Kitchen Garden Vegetables' on very tiny fragmented pieces of land that are as small as 2 to 5 gunthas. The Kathkaris being basically nomadic in nature, they would not settle down and tend to migrate in search of livelihood opportunities. One of the livelihood opportunities in which they have honed their skills has been at brick kiln sites and making of coal from wood.

SVD while working with the Kathkaris decided to work with those livelihoods that they excelled in and hence also while viewing the livelihood options to be taken up they have opted to choose agriculture-related livelihoods.

The women interviewed in Khamjai Village in Mangaon taluka, have stated that this year they will undertake cultivation in 'pulses' after they were motivated through a visit to Nandvi and Kushede village. During the visit to these two villages, the women witnessed the success of cultivation in pulses which was shared with them by the women from the SHGs. As part of the process of support by SVD, the women have to first submit a budget on the proposed cultivation which is arrived at after a detailed discussion during the months of March/April.

The Savitri Vikas SHG women from Rudravali village have taken three acres of land on lease from a Maratha family for the sum of Rs. 6000/-, in contrast, last year they had to pay Rs. 9000/- as rent for the land taken on lease at Morba village. The transport expenses were high hence they ended up paying a high cost to clear the lease rent resulting in a no-profit, no loss equation. The women have decided to undertake the cultivation of Karli (Bitter Gourd) vegetables. This is the second year they have decided to take up this cultivation as they have learned from their experiences of the last year. They have now taken land on lease which is lower

in rent and secondly the distance to the land is within walking distance to the village. The major foreseen expenses are in the area of land clearing, seeds, and irrigation costs. For these SVD has stepped in and provided them with finance to tide over for which they submit a budget. E.g. if their request is for seeds and manure they receive the request and pay half the amount and return the remaining after they receive their profits. The major hurdle to overcome will be the price that they will obtain for their crop for which they have to rely on the middlemen market traders. For this, they hope to find support in the NGO SVD.

Kathkari Women within the entrepreneurial Eco-Systems:

Women Entrepreneurship has often been viewed through the traditional prism of operating ventures in areas like food production, growing fruits, flowers and vegetables, pickle and papad making, and encouraging women to take up tailoring allied options. Later many other nontraditional options were explored like beauty parlours, jewellery making, handicrafts, electrical, electronic, and chemical small scale manufacturing units. According to Marpady and Ingle, (2012), factors like landholdings, subsidiary occupations, agro-climatic conditions, socio personal characteristics of rural women and their family members differ from place to place, all directly or indirectly contribute to entrepreneurship development. In Raigad, the initiatives taken up by Kathkari women should be seen in the context of their role in family and society. They are seen as sharers in the burden of family responsibilities and their capacity to work and contribute has always been considered to be equal in nature.

Social Work Practitioners have constantly faced a huge challenge of working with tribals as the mindset of tribals needs to be understood in the context of their special cultural

conditions. “While families are tightly knit, there is a lack of trust and affinity to come together in a group for any endeavour. This has been one of the most important drawbacks of the community to progress and also one of the hindrances for many of the livelihood interventions of our partners” (Dwivedi 2017).

One of the pillars of Kathkaris' existence has been their strong connectedness to nature and the environment. They blend easily into every expression of the environment from the time of their birth to progressing through every milestone in their life. They are able to identify plants and herbs and use them effectively to find cures for all kinds of sicknesses and ailments. Their ability to connect with nature has led them to be strong defenders of nature and the forests. The fact that they cut branches of the trees and shrubs for gathering firewood for their household purpose and livelihood does not make them violators of civic laws but they do so through a sense of harmony that they seek to maintain in the ecological makeup of their surroundings. In this context one of the questions that surface is, “Are the tribal women able to pursue possible access to livelihood opportunities in the context of depleting natural resources in the area?” Further “What kind of resources do women possess with which they could start their livelihood /enterprise initiative?

**NGOs that seek to build viable Eco-Systems for Kathkari Women:
(finance, knowledge, handholding, and markets):**

While attempting to understand the Eco-System in which Entrepreneurships develop it is imperative to understand how NGOs can emerge as an important partner in creating and blending the various aspects of the entrepreneurial ecosystems when it comes to women who desire to take an initiative and more so when those women are Kathkari

women. In the XISR study, 21% of social workers and teachers interviewed were of the opinion that NGO partners have taken steps to set up SHGs for women that promote livelihood. It also indicated that 13% of the tribals have worked to spread awareness of Government schemes for livelihood and entrepreneurship while 16% of the social workers and teachers affirmed that NGO partners have actually helped tribals to implement the Government Employment Scheme (Rojgar Hami Yojana). Further 16% of the social workers and teachers opined that NGO partners have actually assisted tribals to set up small businesses. While interviewing the SHG women in the two villages (Talegaon and Rudrauli), the women have emphatically stated that “The only source of support has been SVD who have given them information on the possible livelihood opportunities along with required trainings to enhance their capabilities”.

As per the Study by XISR, 88% of the tribals who responded were willing to return to their village and not migrate provided that NGO partners promote better opportunities there. According to 49.2 percent of tribals, the NGO partners have taken steps to prevent migration. However, only 19.4% were of the opinion that they have succeeded in preventing migration. Finally, an overwhelming 94.25% of the tribals expressed a wish that they would want the NGO partners to take steps to prevent migration by providing them options for alternative sustainable livelihoods.

Sarva Vikas Deep (SVD) as an NGO has attempted to create a 'model' for creating livelihoods and developing women entrepreneurs. Since 2006 they have engaged with women from 89 tribal hamlets and consistently worked at the formation of SHGs. These groups consist of 10 to 12 women who save around 50 to 100 Rs. per month and actively take part in the discussion in the groups and the various

responsibilities to bring about change in their village. SVD then went on to strengthening these SHGs as they began the process of inter-loaning within their groups. The women then formed a Federation and met regularly under the guidance of SVD functionaries in their monthly '*Vichar Manthan* Meetings', which means a reflective discussion on the processes happening in their groups. During the meetings, a particular theme is taken up for discussion and input too is provided by the social workers or sometimes even by resource persons. They have taken up many topics for discussion that range from land issues to social issues like child marriage. One of the topics which have had a great impact on the women has been on Livelihood where they discussed the various alternatives that they need to take up in the context of 'seasonal migration'. SVD took up the challenge and with a clear framework undertook their pilot initiatives with four SHGs which then went onto 10 SHGs. Six SHGs have been working on Agricultural Livelihood and four SHGs have taken up Non-Agricultural livelihood.

The SVD Model for fostering livelihood and developing entrepreneurs works on the premise that the Kathkaris have the entrepreneurial capacity. However certain challenges like finance, some process knowledge, handholding and marketing support would enable them to gain a foothold and strengthen them to take up alternate livelihoods with confidence. Later the same group of women who have become successful in their initiatives will then take up the mantle from the SVD facilitators and become Entrepreneurs themselves guiding and creating new opportunities for budding Kathkari women who want to take up similar livelihood initiatives or even explore new avenues for livelihood.

SVDs invite women entrepreneurs to present their livelihood budgeted initiatives to SVD functionaries who

then review the proposal and budget, Feedback is provided and where necessary, guidance to make their budgets realistic and workable. In some cases, they are even taken for an exposure visit to enable them to visualize the process as it happened for the SHG women from Talegaon who were taken on an exposure visit to Majrone village to understand the processes involved in the '*Haldi*' cultivation. After the budgets are approved the groups are then provided with 100% financial aid or tangible resources e.g. very often the requirement is for seeds and organic manure. The SHGs have to return 50% of the amount as soon as they start reaping the profits from the sale of the produce. They do so in installments of 30+10+10 % of the amount of the loan taken. The proportion of return depends on the capacity of the SHG borrowing or even if they so desire they may return the entire 50% immediately. SVD sources its subsidy of 50% from their donors. In the first two years, 50% is offered as a subsidy so that the SHG is able to find support to take on their initiative with the least source of threat of failure. By the third year, the SHG then has to return 75% of the loan and in the fourth year, the entire 100 percent of the loan has to be returned. SVD has experienced a surety in this process and has realized the creditworthiness of the Kathkaris who have not defaulted for even a single time since they have initiated this model.

The success stories of women SHGs taking up livelihoods have been increasing with each year. One of the SHG groups from Nevi Muthali in Mangaon cultivated *Karli* (Bitter Gourd) and have reaped a profit of around 4 lakhs last year. In this SHG six women have been very active in the process of cultivation and even got their husbands and children involved in the fields as the work increased. Two SHG groups took up Ragi (*Naachni*) cultivation on the slopes of the hills near their hamlets. The cost of the investments in this initiative was quite low as the cost of two-kilo seeds was

as low as 90 Rs. The only challenge they faced was that of finding a market that would acquire their produce. The local market offered them a low price hence they turned to SVD to find alternatives. Dwivedi (2018) made some interesting observations on the challenges faced by Kathkari women, “the lack of financial literacy leads them to being duped by traders and merchants when they are selling their crops or products especially forest-based products like cashew. There are also many other post-production challenges concerning marketing and sales. The Katkaris lack a fixed space/outlet for hawking/selling their products and often face harassment from other hawkers or the policemen in the market, roadside, or railway stations where they sit and vend their goods from their *Toplas* (basket). Interestingly, I also observed a lack of fair price justice in the buyers of these goods who would often haggle and quote low prices, seemingly firm in their minds of what their seller deserved”.

SVD rose to the challenge and explored a larger market in Vashi (APMC) where they could sell their produce for a better profit. However even these sales were low, finally, SVD reflected on this process and found a way to add value to these grains by sprouting and drying them, thereby earning a larger profit. They were able to share these profits with the SHGs by giving them 5 Rs more than even the existing market rate. SVD formed a mixed SHG consisting of Kathkari tribals, Maratha women, and even staff who were involved in the process to ensure stability to the process. This resulted in a profit story with SVD procuring and marketing over 4 tonnes of Ragi in the past two years. They are now in the process of making this an independent SHG Women Entrepreneurs group.

Another story of success has been two Kathkari women SHGs from Chandewadi and Vaki villages who took the effort to systematically work on the process of managing a

Brick Kiln with the SHG women and their families who were also employed to make bricks. They sought the assistance of SVD to carefully manage their financial dealings, especially when dealing with the procurement of mud and the sale of brick to the customers. They did face challenges from certain payments that had to be made which they managed in their local style. The success lay in their ability to stand by their commitment to return their loan through a supply of bricks to SVD itself who acquired them at the market rate. Another successful experiment has been the process of acquiring and rearing of the local breed of goats acquired by the women from four SHGs. The processes involved have been marked by the group's ability to take up the health maintenance of the goats with the regular contacts with the doctor who monitored the health of the goats and with a tie-up with a goat rearing insurance company who was able to provide them insurance as they too were convinced of the creditworthiness of the SHG tribal women in terms of their ability to pay their regular insurance installments. During my interactions with the SHG Kathkari tribal women from Talegaon and Rudravali, one of the constant remarks has been that “SVD staff have been regular in their village visits, providing information and motivating them to undertake such initiatives which they have not regretted taking”.

The government initiatives including Stand-Up India, MUDRA, and NITI Aayog's recent Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) have made efforts to promote women entrepreneurship to a great extent. Several women-led leadership and mentorship programs such as empoWer, SAHA Fund, and Sonder Connect are also gaining ground in India. However, it is important to note whether information about these schemes actually penetrates into remote rural India. The SHG women from both the villages (Talegaon and Rudravali) have neither

explored nor taken benefit from any other self-employment opportunities from the government as they did not have the knowledge and neither have they obtained any such information from government officials. They received no information from their Gram Sevak nor the village representatives and according to the women even during the Gram Sabha, such information was not available.

The Khamjai SHG in Talegaon, Mangaon taluka through the Krishi Vibhag undertook 'Tree Plantations' where three women planted eighty-one trees each and they were paid through the Employment Guarantee Scheme of the Government. They received 206 Rs for each day's work and were paid Rs. 1200 for the first phase. As per the Prime Minister's Kisan Yojana, they received only Rs. 4000/- out of Rs. 6000/- in two installments of Rs. 2000/- into their bank accounts. If ever they attempted to ask the Gram Sevak for any information on schemes they would answer that no such GR has come from the office.

Recommendations and Suggestions to Key Stakeholders:

The recommendations and suggestions throw light on possible avenues of support structures that need to be framed or existing schemes and services that can be modified that can possibly lead to an enabling environment for tribal women to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations and perhaps also impact social policy.

The one request from Khamjai SHG women from Talegaon village is that they be assisted to sell their produce so as to reduce the exploitation of middlemen traders who do not give them an adequate price for the crops. This is one area that SVD would need to explore and provide a good market. With the help of the Government, a minimum price index can be fixed to stabilize the price and a proper forum provided to purchase their produce.

The Savitri Vikas SHG women farmers from Rudraveli are looking for support in building their homes. They requested the Government to provide them a grant of Rs. Two lakhs. They would then not have to migrate. Secondly, since the village is in the forest area, they have no proper land and water facilities. Thirdly the Government could provide them Diesel at a subsidized rate as they spend at least Rs. 700 per day to irrigate the land with a pump.

As per the XISR Study, 45% of social workers and teachers were of the opinion that the creation of employment opportunities in the village by the NGO partners would prevent migration in future. One of the main challenges the Savitri Vikas SHG women from Rudraveli expressed is that they face the problem of finding a market for their *Karli* (Bitter Gourd) vegetable produce. They do explore possible market options; however, they mentioned that they are ready to negotiate with the Vashi traders who constantly keep visiting the area searching for plantations that are ready and then they make a pitch for the crop. They provide them with bags to store the crop and they come with their transport facilities to pick up the crop. The traders pay the women a part advance and only once they have sold the crop in the Vashi market do they pay the remaining amount. Usually, they do so when they come to pick up the next consignment. Since they were cheated in the last year, this year they are looking for alternatives and have approached SVD to provide support for a market for their produce.

The Way Forward – An NGO supported System Model:

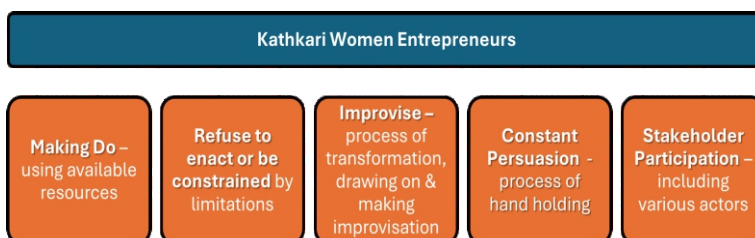
In the light of the key challenges/concerns faced namely: Limited Resources (absence of land, water, forests), Unavailable Finance (no savings), and the struggle that the Kathkaris face in the Subsistence Market places (base of the pyramid market places) a possible framework has emerged from the SVD Model of Intervention. The tribal mindset is

not a negative construct but positive in the context of how they view reality. They live and work within the resources they possess and it is important for the social work practitioner to understand the dynamics that take place between social entrepreneurship and inclusive growth in subsistence market places. Tribals have been denied access to their very own resources i.e land, water, and resources and now even in livelihood, a space to subsistence market places, *"Inclusive growth encompasses the improvements in the social and economic wellbeing of communities that have structurally been denied access to resources, capabilities, and opportunities"* (George, McGahan, and Prabhu 2012, p. 661). In the article, "Understanding the Dynamics Between Social Entrepreneurship and Inclusive Growth in Subsistence Marketplaces: Azmat, Ferdous & Couchman (2015) have shared their findings on three fundamental constructs of 'bricolage' i.e. "making do, refusing to enact or be constrained by limitations, and improvising – making bricolage a process of ongoing transformation, drawing on and combining resources".



In this context one needs to understand the role that NGOs can play in creating women entrepreneurs who lead the

target group through this process, the proposed framework will perhaps lead the reader into understanding how SVD has and can play this role in a more constructive and innovative way.



"Making do" generally refers to using available resources at hand to create value and is extended to include refusal to enact limitations, whereby actors resist environmental constraints (Baker and Nelson 2005; Di Domenico et al. 2010). Another construct closely aligned with, but distinct from, the making do concept is improvisation or using best-fit approaches and a process of trial and error to create value (Di Domenico et al. 2010). Di Domenico et al. (2010) further extend the concept of bricolage to "social bricolage" by proposing additional constructs such as social value creation, stakeholder participation, and persuasion in a social entrepreneurship context. Viswanathan, Sridharan, et al. (2009) highlight that subsistence marketplaces are characterized by extreme resource constraints, such as lack of affordability at a product level, interdependence among people at a relationship level, and lack of mobility and dependence on groups at a marketplace level. Thus, social entrepreneurs operating in such market places are likely to act as bricoleurs to integrate and harness the limited tangible resources available (i.e., make do) to facilitate the creation of positive shared value, leading to inclusive growth at a macro level."

Conclusion:

Creating Women Entrepreneurs is an arduous task as it involves a process that attempts to win confidence, build confidence and make the target group believe in themselves that they can make it to a new level where they can be contributors to the family and society. The findings of this paper point in the direction that with a little assistance, Kathkari women can definitely take initial steps in stabilizing their livelihood initiatives and become entrepreneurs who contribute back to the *Kathkari Samaj* by leading other women entrepreneurs to take up this challenge. The role played by NGOs to help Kathkari women entrepreneurs to “make-do” in the initial process to take initiatives and maximize their earnings, will go a long way to bring about a culturally sensitive community leading to inclusion at all levels. And finally, the growth of any society depends on the last link, connectivity, which will make all the difference!

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ROLE OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN BUILDING RESILIENCE: A STUDY AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Introduction: Research indicates that social participation and civic engagement have a significant influence on the wellbeing and positive development of adolescents. It is a strength-based perspective that promotes better civic, social, and behavioural outcomes among adolescents.

Aims and Objectives: This paper is an attempt to understand the role of social participation and civic engagement in building resilience among adolescents in disadvantaged communities. This study examines factors associated with social participation and civic engagement of adolescents in disadvantaged communities, their participation in social and civic activities and its influence on resilience.

Materials and Methods: This study was conducted among adolescents in the age group between 15 to 19 years from three different disadvantaged communities in Kerala. Twenty-four adolescents were selected for this qualitative study using a purposive sampling technique. The data was collected using in depth interviews and FGDs with adolescents.

Results: The themes that emerged from the data were opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and abilities, exposure to the outside world, stigma and discrimination, underutilization of available resources and lack of mentors and positive adult role models.

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Conclusion: *The study suggests the need for strengthening social support systems, specific interventions and involvement of stakeholders to promote social participation and civic engagement in enhancing resilience among adolescents in disadvantaged communities.*

Key words: Adolescents, Social participation, Civic engagement, Resilience, Disadvantaged communities

Introduction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) plays a pivotal role in advocating for social participation and civic engagement among adolescents, recognizing the interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement of these terms. Social participation, stemming from family, peer groups, and communities, converges with civic engagement, emphasizing adolescents' active involvement to enhance community conditions. Adolescents in disadvantaged communities, grappling with various adversities, can exhibit resilience and successful advancement through active social and civic participation. Researches indicate that adolescents engaged in voluntary activities demonstrate greater academic commitment, lower involvement in problematic behaviors, and improved well-being. Involvement in extracurricular and positive social activities fosters resilience by cultivating cognitive and behavioral assets essential for overcoming adversity. Additionally, Engaged adolescents develop positive perceptions and stronger community connections compared to their uninvolved counterparts (Denault & Poulin, 2009). Adolescents involved in extracurricular activities in school and other community-based activities have been found to possess more positive perceptions of others, including parents and peers, and exhibit greater academic engagement than their uninvolved peers. However, engagement in social activities, particularly those involving group interactions with peers, is linked to an increased likelihood of adopting risky

behaviors. Notably, participation in self-development social activities is associated with a reduced inclination to risky behaviors.

Extracurricular activities exhibit both direct and indirect effects moderated by community-level socioeconomic status, with individuals in low socioeconomic status communities benefiting the most despite lower participation levels (O'Donnell, Redmond, Gardner, Wang, & Mooney, 2023). In disadvantaged communities, young individuals report more frequent negative local social interactions, which detrimentally affect their subjective well-being by diminishing trust in neighbors (Laurence, 2019). Civic engagement acts as a compensatory mechanism, helping disadvantaged adolescents navigate resource constraints through exploration and altruism, which fosters personal development in resilience, identity, and social capital (Webb, Cox, Cumbers, Martikke, Gedzielewski, & Duale, 2017).

Positive associations between civic engagement and a sense of meaningfulness in life underscore the importance of family support and relationships in enhancing adolescents' sense of purpose (Fong & To, 2022). Civic engagement, encompassing volunteering and voting, is linked to subsequent improvements in mental health and social behaviors (Ballard, Hoyt, & Pachucki, 2019). Fostering civic participation promotes civic and educational outcomes in emerging adulthood (Chan, Ou, & Reynolds, 2014) and enhances overall well-being (Hart, Matsuba, & Atkins, 2014).

Although research recognizes the positive impact of adolescent civic engagement on subsequent income and education levels, few studies have explored its effects on development of adolescents in disadvantaged communities. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the role of social participation and civic engagement in reducing

vulnerability and enhancing resilience among adolescents in disadvantaged communities in the Indian context, providing insights into effective strategies for promoting positive youth development.

Methodology

The study examines the role of social participation and civic engagement in building resilience among adolescents in disadvantaged communities. It also highlights their experiences, the role of community resources in promoting social participation and engagement and factors associated with participation and civic engagement and its role in building resilience among adolescents. A phenomenological approach was adopted in this qualitative study. This study was conducted among adolescents in the age group between 15 to 19 years from three different disadvantaged communities in Kerala. Adolescents including both girls and boys were selected using a purposive sampling technique and interviewed. It aimed to include school-going adolescents, dropouts, working youth, and those balancing work and study, while excluding individuals with severe disabilities or psychiatric issues, to maintain consistency in participant perspectives. Access to three communities was facilitated through collaboration with local leaders, officials, and representatives of local self-government. Initially conducting visits during holidays, the researcher, leveraging her role as a teacher, engaged with adolescents naturally and established trust. Subsequent regular weekend visits allowed sustained interaction and deeper insights into the participants' lives and perspectives. Twenty-four in depth interviews and two FGDs with adolescents were conducted in Malayalam. Audio recordings were made for interviews with participants who were comfortable and had consented to being recorded. The data was manually analysed. All the in-depth interviews and FGDs were transcribed and organised into various categories based on which themes were identified. The ethical principles were strictly followed

throughout the entire study. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the study and took oral consent from them. It was ensured that the participants would not be hurt in any way during this study and would not be coerced into participation. To ensure confidentiality, the data were anonymized using pseudonyms for the participants.

A. Participation in meaningful activities

The study's results indicate that social participation and civic engagement primarily occur through local associations and groups, as well as the utilization of community resources.

Theme 1: Involvement in local associations and groups

Analysis reveals that though there are associations and groups in the communities they often lack activities and programs aimed at the positive development of adolescents. Only a minority of adolescents actively engage in social activities within these associations. The primary forms of social participation among adolescents in these communities include participation in various religious and national festivals. Balasabha, a structured neighbourhood network for children, is a platform that focuses on the overall development of children through a rights-based approach, enhancing their creativity and leadership skills to promote civic engagement. However, it is revealed that Balasabha does not fully serve its intended purpose as it appears to be influenced by a political party, which compromises its effectiveness. Adithyan said;

“I have not got any benefit from the Balasabha. Children gather once a month and interact with each other and leave. No skill development programmes are conducted in Bhalasabha. I feel that it is a platform for the children to join a particular political party. Balasabha was formed in our community by a political party. They asked my

seniors to join the party when they attained 18 years.”- Adityan, Boy, 17 years

Some adolescents are members of political parties, but many are not interested in politics due to feeling exploited by these parties. In contrast, a few adolescent boys and girls are actively involved in politics because their families have benefited from political activities. Among those engaged in local associations like fan associations, most are involved in risky behaviors under the guise of these associations. Girls, in particular, often lack opportunities for social interactions beyond their communities.

Theme2: Utilisation of community resources

The analysis reveals that library and youth clubs are the two important resources locally available for a positive development of adolescents. Youth clubs are considered as local resources which adolescents can easily access. Those who do not have youth clubs in their respective communities pointed out their need to have one to promote sports and arts and their growth and development. However, the youth club which is already available in a community is frequently misused by adults and elders for activities like smoking, drinking, and viewing inappropriate content, thus limiting their potential benefits for adolescents. Similarly, libraries are the most underutilised resource in these communities. Only a few adolescents from these communities are regular visitors of the library and make use of the various facilities in the library. Sarangi who has membership in the library said;

I am a regular visitor in a library nearby. I used to borrow books and read them. I receive great support and guidance from the elders in the library. I have finished writing a poem and have given it for publishing with the help of the library people. – Sarangi, girl, 15 years

Local libraries organise various activities and programs for adolescents. Although adolescents are invited to participate in these events, many choose not to attend, citing a lack of perceived benefit.

B. Influence of participation and civic activities on resilience

The study found that social participation and civic engagement provide opportunities for adolescents to interact with mentors from various fields who motivate and inspire them. They also get opportunities to learn new skills and discover their abilities and are exposed to the outside world through participating in meaningful social activities.

Theme1: Interactions with positive role models and exposure to the outside world

The presence of role models is one of the most valuable resources for adolescents. However, most adolescents in these communities report a lack of access to such role models within their communities. Some of the adolescents reported that participation and civic engagement provide them opportunities for being exposed to the outside world and interacting with positive adult role models. Their interactions with some of the mentors from the library, school, community-based organisations and other people in various fields have helped them develop ambition and have provided them with useful information about several opportunities for adolescents. Positive interactions with mentors contributed to adolescents distancing themselves from negative community influences, keeping them engaged in constructive activities that enhance resilience and reduce the likelihood of risky behaviour.

Theme 2: Discovering and learning new skills

Participation in various activities helps adolescents discover their abilities and acquire new skills. Active involvement in

programmes organised by community-based associations and NGOs has contributed to their growth despite adversities. For instance, Devika's involvement in a volleyball coaching camp, membership in a hockey team, and participation in a theater camp organized by an NGO provided her with strong support. It has boosted her confidence. She said;

I think I am very bold. Initially, I was scared and had stage fear. Participation in their activities has helped me boost my confidence and now I am confident enough to speak in front of others and have no stage fear. I still have contacts with some of them. With their guidance I started writing poems and Novels. They had promised me that my novel would get published. I got immensely benefited through the various programmes and camps and interacting with people who organise such kinds of programmes. - Devika, girl, 15 years

However, participation in extracurricular activities within schools was found to be minimal. While schools organize camps and other programs, not all students have equal opportunities to participate. They also reported lack of encouragement from school authorities. Girls, in comparison to boys, tend to be more actively involved in club activities and school programs. Those participating in extracurricular activities tend to become more self-reliant and show increased interest in studies, contributing to their overall success. Participation in extracurricular activities helped them find opportunities to explore areas of interest, acquire skills and develop talents which lead to success in their life.

C. Factors associated with Social Participation and Civic Engagement

There are various factors which promote their participation or exclude them from social participation and civic activities in the community. These include stigma and discrimination from outside their community and reinforcement from their own community.

Theme 1: Stigma and Discrimination

Social stigma and discrimination are predominant issues in the case of disadvantaged communities. The indifference or hostility with which society treats adolescents may further traumatize them. Adolescents shared experiences of being discriminated by individuals outside the community, school authorities, and politicians, which limit their social interaction. According to most of them, disadvantaged communities have a negative image even outside the community. Jai said;

We never get opportunities to interact with children of our age outside the community as they are not allowed by their parents to interact with children from our community. They feel that their children will get into bad habits if they enter our community.-Jai, boy, 16 years.

Discrimination and stigma limit adolescents' participation and involvement in various activities of the community. They choose to withdraw from the community interactions in order to avoid negative appraisals.

Theme 2: Reinforcement from the family and community

Some of the adolescents shared that the community is a source of support. They attend football coaching camps and go for football tournaments under the banner of their community with elders' support and encouragement. At the same time, most of the adolescents feel that members of the community do not encourage youngsters when they take up new initiatives. Though some are very good at taking

initiative and organising programmes in the community especially during festival seasons, they often face resistance from community members especially women, fearing potential misuse or negative consequences. Shaffy said;

We wanted to start a club and conduct various programmes during festivals but we were not allowed by the women in the community to do that. They think we could do bad things under the banner of the club. - Shaffy, boy, 19 years

During the FGD, adolescent boys reported that changes are not possible with the kind of attitude the elders have. Even if youngsters want to do something good for the community, elders did not support them. Majority of the adolescent girls are not involved in any activities as they are discouraged by their family members to attend.

Although schools occasionally organize extracurricular activities, some students do not have equal access to these opportunities due to a lack of encouragement. While girls tend to be more actively involved in club activities and school programs compared to boys, school authorities may not consistently promote sports and arts among students. Some adolescents express dissatisfaction with the limited availability of extracurricular activities and the perceived lack of interest and motivation from teachers. Despite these challenges, some of them have found personal growth and positive influences through participation in extracurricular activities, even when not fully supported by teachers.

In summary, the study underscores the importance of providing meaningful social activities and better utilizing community resources for adolescents' positive development. It also highlights the challenges associated with political influence, stigma, discrimination, and inadequate

community and school support that need to be addressed to fully realize the potential of such activities for adolescent growth and resilience.

Discussion

The study highlights the critical importance of creating meaningful opportunities for adolescents to participate in constructive activities within their communities. Engaging in goal-directed social activities fosters self-reliance, skill acquisition, and talent development, which are crucial for success in life. Existing literature reveals that involvement in clubs, groups, and other social activities positively impact self-esteem and strengthens connections with others, thereby enhancing confidence and autonomy against negative peer pressure (Shweder et al., 2006; McGee et al., 2006; Leventhal, Dupéré, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). However, there is a notable scarcity of adolescents engaging in such meaningful activities, particularly among those with lower socioeconomic status, who show lower participation rates, especially in sports clubs and organizations (Damelang & Klob, 2013). Structured and supervised extracurricular activities, both within and outside school, are critical in promoting positive adolescent development. Initiatives should focus on fostering skills and confidence through diverse extracurricular activities, ensuring equitable access and support from school authorities and community leaders. Despite challenges, some adolescents in disadvantaged communities demonstrate the ability to leverage available resources, suggesting untapped potential. This underscores the need for a deeper exploration of factors that facilitate or hinder adolescents' utilization of community resources effectively. Furthermore, positive interactions with mentors and role models outside the community can significantly enhance resilience and personal development (Peck et al., 2008). Reinforcing support systems at the family and community levels is urgent, alongside promoting youth

leadership and engagement through local resources such as clubs, libraries, and religious institutions. Existing literature emphasizes the significance of youth organizations and organized activities for adolescents residing in disadvantaged areas (Quane & Rankin, 2006). Addressing political influences, improving management and accessibility of community resources, and combating stigma and discrimination are crucial steps. Therefore, active involvement of stakeholders is essential for promoting social participation and civic engagement among adolescents in disadvantaged communities. By overcoming significant barriers and challenges to adolescent participation in meaningful activities, providing supportive environments, and addressing systemic issues, communities can empower adolescents to contribute positively and overcome adversity, thereby enhancing their resilience and capabilities.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the importance of social participation and civic engagement as valuable tools for building resilience among adolescents facing adversity. By addressing the identified factors and promoting positive community engagement, we can empower these adolescents to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives despite challenging circumstances. It is essential to recognize and harness the potential of young people as active contributors to their communities, ultimately promoting their well-being and positive development.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Declaration

The article is original and has not been earlier published nor been submitted for publication elsewhere.

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RURAL LIBRARIES AS PLACES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN ASSAM

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Abstract

This study explores the potential of rural public libraries in Assam to empower women by addressing their diverse information needs in education, vocational skills, health, childcare, communication, and family governance. Despite their critical role, rural libraries in Assam face challenges such as inadequate resources, lack of ICT support, insufficient funding, and untrained workforce.. These challenges hinder their ability to serve as effective platforms for disseminating government e-governance project information and other need-based resources aimed at empowering women. A content analysis was conducted on 44 scholarly articles about women's empowerment in Assam, sourced from the Scopus database, to identify the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing women's empowerment. These factors were analyzed to develop a framework that enables libraries to function as community information hubs. The findings reveal significant gaps in women's access to essential information, emphasizing the need for well-resourced rural libraries to foster gender equality and address socio-economic challenges. Immediate government action is recommended to strengthen rural libraries as vital social service organizations.

Keywords: *Women empowerment, Women Literacy, Rural Libraries, Assam, Schemes*

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Introduction

Assam is the largest state in the north-eastern region of India in terms of population with sex ratio of 958 females per thousand males and the second largest state in terms of geographical area with abundant natural resources available. Since the sex ratio of Assam is higher than in many other states of India, women are lacking in so many opportunities. They are viewed as the most vulnerable members of society, and are frequently excluded from making significant decisions. The standing of women in society needs to be improved, and it has become a great challenge. Today, however, we observe that many women are aware of their rights, and the empowerment of women has emerged as a new global challenge. There is a positive relationship between overall literacy rate and percentage of female main workers in Assam. Raising awareness is necessary to accomplish the state's goal of empowering women. (Nayak & Mahanta, 2009)

In today's world, public libraries are a vital educational institution. They offer knowledge and insights into a nation's political and economic landscape. The only public entities in society that gather and store all forms of social information and assist in spreading it to every member of the community. Public libraries include rural libraries as well. A rural library is a library, or library system, that provides services to a population that resides mostly in distant areas, on farms, and in rural communities (Reitz, 2004).

Empowerment means the process of becoming stronger and assured in particular in controlling one's existence and claiming one's rights. Empowering women can be described as promoting women's experience of self-worth, their capacity to decide their choices, and their right to persuade social adjustments for themselves and others. According to Mahatma Gandhi, Women empowerment is a situation

“When women, whom we call abala become sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful.” (Patel, 2008,) There are three main factors through which we can rate the status of women empowerment in the state, they are- demographic status, employment status, and educational status. Women are becoming more and more entrepreneurs in modern India, particularly in micro, small, and medium-sized businesses. Women in India are always attempting to make an economic name for themselves. Despite the fact that men and women go through identical steps in the entrepreneurial process, women actually encounter several obstacles in the field of entrepreneurship (Chithambaram, 2020). "Having a wage implies having economic power" (Elliott, 2008, p.86).

The primary goal of this study is to demonstrate how women can empower themselves through a variety of activities with the support of rural libraries in Assam. The lack of empowerment among rural women in emerging societies means that they continue to be the most disadvantaged group. Many government and non-governmental organizations, as well as initiatives, have emerged in recent years with the goal of empowering rural women to alleviate their suffering; yet, many rural women lack this empowerment. Information is seen as power, a necessary resource, and the prerequisite for actual empowerment; libraries are vital repositories of information.

Review of Literature

The existence of public libraries and their collaboration with rural libraries can provide services for women and upgrading of public libraries and recommendations for advancements in public libraries' efforts to empower women were significantly influenced by them (Biswas & Deb, 2019). Libraries have long been recognized as vital hubs for empowering women by providing access to information,

fostering literacy, and supporting skill development. Mallikarjun (2004) emphasized the pivotal role of libraries in enhancing women's culture, encouraging leisure and reading, aiding decision-making, and breaking negative habits. By acting as centers of information and reference, libraries contribute to women's empowerment, enabling them to navigate a world increasingly shaped by science and technology. Similarly, Jain and Saraf (2013) highlighted the role of libraries in empowering underprivileged communities through information dissemination and ICT applications, aligning with government and NGO efforts to alleviate poverty.

The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in libraries has revolutionized their services, making them more dynamic and inclusive. Ghosh (2007) underlined the importance of ICT in transforming public libraries into centers for managing information from diverse sources. Kalyani and Murugan (2019) observed that job-oriented programs in libraries play a significant role in empowering women, particularly when combined with effective workshops and seminars. Similarly, Sasi (2014) noted that educated women often use libraries to access job-related information and develop careers, demonstrating how ICT and library programs can bridge the digital divide.

Public libraries play a crucial role in community development and gender empowerment. Bhat (2017) emphasized the role of libraries in fostering self-improvement and bridging gender disparities, particularly in developing regions. This aligns with the findings of Akhtar et al. (2021), who explored the role of rural public libraries in West Bengal in empowering young women through educational programs and community engagement. These findings resonate with global initiatives like UNESCO's Digital Library projects, which aim to provide equitable access to information and promote lifelong

learning. Libraries also serve as platforms for social activities and community interaction, fostering women's empowerment through collective participation. Sasi (2014) discussed how libraries organize activities to spread awareness about the benefits of empowerment. These social engagements complement the library's role as an educational and informational hub, as highlighted by Kalyani and Murugan (2019), who advocated for women-centric orientation programs and workshops. Globally, IFLA's "Women's Empowerment through Libraries" projects exemplify how libraries can serve as transformative spaces for women.

Overall, these studies emphasize the multidimensional role of libraries in empowering women through education, ICT integration, employment support, and social inclusion. Libraries are not only centers for information access but also catalysts for breaking barriers, fostering independence, and achieving gender equality, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality. This highlights the importance of the active role of rural libraries in empowering women for which a framework has been discussed based on the necessities.

Objectives of the Study

- a) To identify and analyse the key factors affecting women's empowerment in Assam through a comprehensive content analysis of scholarly publications.
- b) To develop a practical framework for rural libraries in Assam aimed at overcoming the identified barriers to women's empowerment.

Methods and Materials

This study adopts a qualitative research design using content analysis to identify and examine the key issues affecting

women's empowerment in Assam. A total of 44 academic documents were retrieved from the Scopus database using the search keywords: “women AND empowerment AND Assam.”. In addition to academic sources, official government publications were consulted to supplement the findings from the literature. These include - The official website of the Government of Assam's Department of Women & Child Development, The Handbook on Schemes for Women and Children, published in December 2021. These resources provided reliable and up-to-date information on the various schemes, initiatives, and institutional mechanisms aimed at promoting women's empowerment in the state. The key themes identified through this analysis have been considered as a base for developing a framework.

Framework Development

Main Themes	Key Issues	n (No. of articles reflecting each theme)
Education and Literacy	Education is a foundational element of empowerment (Bhattacharyya, 2016), Access to financial, Economic, environmental resources (Hazarika & Goswami, 2018; Bhattacharjee, 2021) Digital Literacy (Borah et al., 2020) Education of women hygiene (Baruah, 2023), tribal women often have lower literacy rates (Brahma et al., 2025).	38

Gender Discrimination	Gender Issues, skewed power relations (Varkey et al., 2024), attitudes toward and experiences of violence (Nath & Das, 2024), Gender disparity inferred in unequal job provision (Brahma et al., 2025), Gender based Violence (Brahma et al., 2025), discrimination against women in cultural and customary traditions (Choudhury & Kumar, 2022), Need of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a form of skills-based education (Dey & Devi, 2019),	35
Awareness on women-centric government schemes	Involvement in state-supported livelihood programs (Bhattacharyya & Viquiline, 2013), Govt scheme awareness need.	18
Role of Mass-Media	Promotive actions could involve communication efforts, including literacy and awareness, SHGs, and community involvement may suggest an indirect role for the media, particularly in raising awareness. Remote tribal areas still have poor media penetration, but social media use is growing and opening up new avenues for women's empowerment.	15
Cultural and Societal attitude	social connections are seen as enablers of confidence, knowledge transfer, and motivation (Hazarika & Goswami, 2018), material and non-material aspects of culture and environment relate to empowerment (Bhattacharjee, 2021), leadership engagement (Nath & Das, 2024), Improved social cohesion for supporting decision making (Sheikh & Narayanan, 2024), low political empowerment (Mahanta, 2020)	23

Knowledge of domestic rights	Access to and Ownership of Land (Varkey et al., 2024; Bhattacharyya, 2016), Legal protection exists but enforcement and awareness need strengthening.	21
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Table 1: Distribution of Key Themes and Findings from scholarly articles (N=44)

A conceptual framework was developed for rural libraries to outline the major factors influencing women's empowerment in Assam. This framework integrates socio-cultural, economic, policy, and institutional dimensions and serves as a guide for future research and policy interventions in the region.

Results:

The following were identified as important priority areas impacting empowerment based on the content analysis of 44 Scopus-indexed papers on women's empowerment in Assam. The results show both improvement and continued challenges, which need to be taken into consideration for future research and policy planning.

Discussion

Through the analysis of scholarly literature, several factors that have a significant influence on women's empowerment in Assam have been identified. These elements, which have been discussed below, must be fully addressed to support genuine and sustained women's empowerment in the region: *Education and Literacy*: Since education is a major factor in women's empowerment, it is imperative that all women have access to high-quality education. In most of the articles that are emphasized, education is continuously cited as a key component of women's empowerment. Furthermore, it was shown that when women had access to financial, economic, and environmental resources, the empowerment process was much strengthened (Hazarika & Goswami, 2018; Bhattacharjee, 2021). Additionally, digital literacy emerged

as a crucial skill that improves women's capacity to engage fully in the contemporary socioeconomic environment (Borah et al., 2020). According to the study, education has a good impact on women's cleanliness and health habits, which enhances their general well-being (Baruah, 2023). Tribal women in Assam, however, were found to be a vulnerable population with lower literacy rates than other tribes, which limits their potential for empowerment (Brahma et al., 2025). Widespread education is necessary for women to effectively address problems such as selective abortion, domestic violence, female infanticide, low family status, and widows' plight.

Gender Discrimination: Women's empowerment is still significantly hampered by gender discrimination, which shows up as uneven employment prospects, financial dependence, and gender-based violence. Discrimination is also reinforced by cultural and traditional customs. The study highlights how crucial technical and vocational education (TVET) is in equipping women with necessary skills. Effective measures to lessen gender disparity and advance women's economic independence include the WADI project's women-centric Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

Awareness on women-centric government schemes: There are several government initiatives aimed at empowering women in Assam. However, over half of the publications also point out that rural women have limited access to these programs and a notable lack of understanding. Many people have been unable to take advantage of assistance programs designed to improve their socioeconomic standing because of this disparity. Important conclusions also highlight the significance of participating in state-sponsored livelihood programs and the pressing need to raise public knowledge of government initiatives to guarantee their efficient use (Bhattacharyya & Viqualine, 2013).

Role of Mass-Media: Fifteen studies specifically emphasized the critical role of mass media in women's empowerment in Assam. These studies revealed that media, as a powerful communication tool, has a dual impact on women's development. While it can reinforce traditional stereotypes and societal perceptions that limit women's roles and visibility, it also holds significant potential to act as a catalyst for change by challenging gender norms and promoting positive representations of women. The findings suggest that media-driven initiatives—such as literacy campaigns, awareness programs, support for Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and community engagement—play an indirect yet vital role in raising awareness and empowering women. Despite poor media penetration in remote tribal areas, the growing use of social media is opening new opportunities for women's empowerment.

Cultural and Societal attitude: Women encounter several obstacles in employment and in society at large, where they are frequently given less priority than males. Women's mobility restrictions, mistrust when they start their own firms, social decision-making exclusion, and social judgment based on roles or appearances are all frequently mentioned in literature. Social ties become important facilitators, encouraging self-assurance, information exchange, and drive (Hazarika & Goswami, 2018). Furthermore, empowerment is influenced by both tangible and intangible cultural and environmental elements (Bhattacharjee, 2021). While increased social cohesiveness promotes more inclusive decision-making processes, leadership participation is crucial to removing these obstacles (Nath & Das, 2024). (Sheikh & Narayanan, 2024). Nonetheless, women's involvement in governance and policy is constrained by the persistently low level of political empowerment (Mahanta, 2020).

Knowledge of domestic rights: A Significant number of studies have shown that the general ignorance about legal rights in Assam is a key obstacle to women's empowerment. Many women, particularly in rural regions, are still unaware of their rights regarding inheritance and property ownership in addition to their personal rights and legal safeguards. Because of this ignorance, they are frequently at risk for sexual assault, mental and physical abuse, and other types of violence, which feeds cycles of insecurity and disempowerment.

Proposed Framework for Rural Libraries in Assam to Empower Women

Women's empowerment goes beyond mere awareness; it requires a comprehensive set of initiatives supported by strong and sustained support systems (Ningombam & Bordoloi, 2024). A framework has been formulated to empower women in the region, considering key factors that have been identified through the contents. This study highlights the gaps and potential intervention points where rural libraries can serve as active agents of change. The framework, therefore, is designed to address these identified needs and challenges, positioning rural libraries not merely as repositories of books, but as dynamic community hubs that facilitate empowerment through knowledge, resources, and engagement.

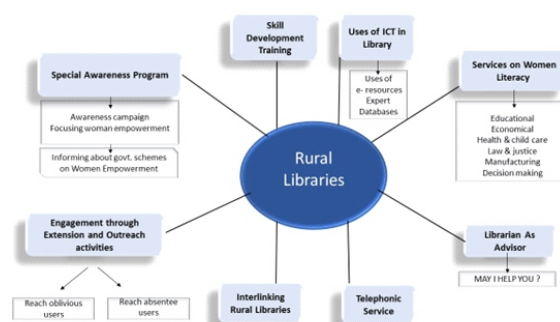


Figure 1: Proposed framework for Rural Library services focusing on women empowerment in Assam

Services on Women's Literacy - Literacy is the ability to read, write, and communicate in society. According to the 2011 census report of govt. of Assam, the Women's Literacy rate in Assam is 60.05% only, and 85.90 % of the total population of Assam lives in rural areas or villages (Assam Population Sex Ratio in Assam Literacy Rate Data 2011-2022). So, it is obvious that rural libraries can play a major role in Assam for developing women's literacy which will help empower them where most of the women live in the rural region of Assam. The rural libraries are free for all and anyone can use their services. Looking into the women's economic condition in villages the rural libraries can greatly help them by providing many services like:

Education - The biggest factor in women's empowerment is education. They may live better lives because of their education. Rural library's top priority is to provide free education to everyone. In Assam's rural areas, where many women lack access to schooling, rural libraries can be crucial in encouraging women to develop a habit of reading. The rural library's collection of resources should be built keeping in mind the village's educated as well as uneducated women. In addition, the library should provide some materials for skill-based education. The library should also aid in the higher education of village women and provide them the power to lead more fulfilling lives. Rural libraries should adhere to several key principles for empowering women via

- Building collection of relevant resources: The resources should be helpful for literate as well as illiterate women.
- Maintaining a safe environment for women to use the library and making them feel comfortable in the library.
- Inviting local women authors or entrepreneurs to make presentations in the library encouraging women users to empower themselves.

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- Special free coaching programs in the library for the higher education of women.

Economic – Economically literate Women can use their reading and writing abilities to manage and make money. Rural libraries should help women to be financially literate. When considering the family's financial situation, managing money or wages is crucial, and women can play a significant role in this process. Additionally, by hosting meetings to provide information services linked to economic perspectives, such as - money saving solutions, how to earn more money, how to manage money, where to invest, rural libraries can help to empower women.

Health & Child care -Women in Assamese communities are often leading unhygienic lives without being aware of the potentially severe consequences on their health. Many of the women in rural areas lack basic health literacy. Rural libraries may actively participate in providing them with health-related information. Librarians play a key role in the implementation of initiatives that encourage women's health literacy in rural libraries. Rural library staff members may advance health literacy by:

- Providing health-related online and print resources
- Assisting women how to use and access digital resources and information related to health
- providing recommendations for other organisations that can assist in providing health services
- Rural libraries can make partnerships with hospitals and health educators to examine the health of women and make them aware of health-related information.

Law & Justice –The protection of people's human rights is aided by an understanding of the law and the legal system. It has been observed that men control women both in society and inside their own families. Many societal constraints

prevent women from becoming empowered. To assist women in accessing their rights they need to be informed of the government's rules and processes relating to justice. Rural libraries may inform residents on law and justice recommendations that will help them fight against violations.

Manufacturing –Product manufacturing and direct product sales greatly help women to empower themselves. Rural libraries can provide the knowledge needed by women who are engaged in industrial processes, such as information on procedures or suggestions for boosting sales. They can get assistance from the rural librarians in finding business, marketing, and other ideas.

Decision Making - Libraries offer a variety of services and information sources to benefit women by providing them with accurate knowledge to make the right decision at the right time. Rural libraries are crucial to the decision-making ability of women in rural communities.

Special Awareness Program: Various awareness campaigns may be run in rural libraries to educate women about the services given by the library. Women need to be aware of the services. To inform women about their services rural libraries can take certain actions, such as organizing a campaign to raise awareness of women's empowerment. In this campaign, the librarians of the rural library can introduce the schemes initiated for women's empowerment. The librarian may inform them of the program's details, including eligibility criteria and application process.

Many women are deprived of government schemes due to ignorance. Again, many intermediaries prevent women from utilizing this knowledge to the fullest. In this situation, the government can establish direct contact with rural libraries

and delegate to the librarians the task of educating women about the schemes. Instead of asking questions to the neighbourhood, women may ask the librarian directly by going to the library. In this situation, rural libraries may be very beneficial.

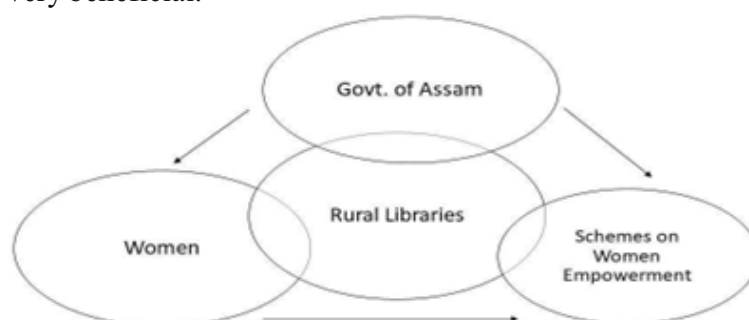


Figure 2: Rural Library as intermediary centre of Government of Assam

Engagement through extension and outreach services:

The engagement of women users in the library will be the first goal of the rural library. Rural libraries may offer a variety of extension and outreach services utilizing audio-visual methods, which can aid women in comprehending the services better. A lot of cultural events can be planned to involve female library users and help them feel inspired, unified, or to develop their self-confidence through involvement. These services should also be available to absentee women users and oblivious women users who are completely unaware of the services offered by rural libraries. The librarian should strive to find out why few women use the library.

Uses of ICT in Library: ICT should be used to automate rural libraries so that they can offer ICT-driven services. The use of expert databases and the collection of e-resources should be available in rural libraries. The rural librarian should assist the women in accessing these online resources as conveniently as possible.

Skill Development Training – Rural Libraries can help women by giving skill development training and other vocational training that aim to increase career options for women across a range of socioeconomic levels and age groupings. The government often takes the initiative to organize skill-development training for women's empowerment, which can be conducted at local rural libraries. The rural libraries may offer a variety of short-term courses, tailor-based courses, industrial skills, technical skills, and many sorts of vocational skill training where the women can come and participate in a safe environment.

Telephonic Services – The rural libraries can provide telephonic services to the women who are not able to come to the library. The librarians should be one phone call away from the women users of the area so that they can ask their queries to the librarian without any hesitation.

Interlinking Rural Libraries – The rural Libraries of the districts should be interlinked and a meeting should be held yearly among a few rural libraries to discuss how they are empowering women in those regions. Interlinking rural libraries can also help to give inter-library loan services to users.

Librarian as an advisor – Irrespective of all services the librarian of the rural libraries should act as an advisor to the women and should help them by giving them relevant information they need to make them empowered. The librarians should be approachable to the women.

Suggestions

The results of this study suggest that the government should give strategic planning for the growth and use of rural libraries in Assam for women's empowerment. To incorporate rural libraries into larger programs for women's

empowerment and rural development, a clear policy framework should be created. These libraries may act as easily accessible hubs for learning, skill building, digital literacy, legal knowledge, and the sharing of information on livelihood, health, and government assistance programs. It is necessary to provide committed financing, skilled personnel, and community collaboration. In addition to strengthening the library system, integrating such interventions into local governance and development plans would directly support Assamese women's empowerment and the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Conclusion

Society is the biggest beneficiary of women's empowerment. Making the community's women powerful is necessary if we want to transform our state into a powerful one. We learned from the discussion above that Assam's development process is not gender-neutral. Women go through a lot of suffering in society. Although there has been progress in our state toward the empowerment of women, there is still much to be done. The government has framed policies related to women's health, education, employment, and awareness, but they are not aware of them. To inform people of these policies has now become a significant challenge. Rural Libraries can be a place to foster women's empowerment in the rural areas of Assam. Setting up Rural Libraries and developing appropriate action plans will be necessary and the government should give due emphasis to this enactment.

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TEACHING CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES: A PRAXIS FRAMEWORK IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

The present paper brings out the debates around conventional and progressive social work education by focusing on the importance of critical theories and perspectives for raising critical consciousness among social work students. Teaching-learning process in social work education is interesting and challenging as it is not only imparting knowledge but stimulating and developing critical minds.

Teaching critical theories in the social work classroom is a crucial strategy to develop a critical perspective among students about social realities. Social work educators need to think beyond what exists in the structured curriculum and use critical approaches to facilitate the learning process..

Key words: *Critical Perspective, Social Work Education, Critical theories, Social Justice, Emancipation*

Framing the Context:

Developing critical perspectives among social work students is interesting, important and at the same time a challenging task. Critical perspectives encourage critical literacy and constant reflection (Hoyos & López, 2024). Ideally, teachers in social work classrooms not only teach theories but ignite the minds of learners to look at reality critically.

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During 1930s and 1940s a group of radical progressive teacher educators encouraged teachers to have critical perspective on the relationship between teaching and social inequities (Groenke, 2009). In doing so teachers need to adopt critical pedagogy in the classroom. The most significant defining feature of critical pedagogy is its emphasis on the emancipatory potential of education (Braa & Callero, 2006). Critical pedagogy constructs its philosophical foundation on notions of empowered, professionalized teachers working to cultivate the intellect and enhance the socioeconomic mobility of students (Kincheloe, 2009). In this process both; teachers and students are actively engaged in reflection, exploration, and explanation of the social process by initiating dialogue based on the questions such as who, when, what, whom, why, where, and how. Engaging in dialogical thinking brings the students closer to the complexity of actual life situations (Shpeizer, 2018). Students' engagement in dialogue with the teacher gives them the impression that their views and experiences are valued. Dialogue seeks not only to increase active student participation in the classroom but also to develop a critical social consciousness in them (Braa & Callero, 2006). The development of critical consciousness among students is necessary to locate their position in knowledge production because as Pritchard argued knowledge is the primary focus of epistemological theorizing (Pritchard, 2010). Social work professionals in and outside of the classroom must be engaged in exploring the reality which is often invisible in hegemonic cultures. Nonetheless, critical pedagogy will necessarily take positive steps to facilitate social change by promoting the development of a counter hegemony (Braa & Callero, 2006). Social work being a profession of change is expected to challenge the unequal hegemonic cultures for creating a just and equitable society. Hence social work professionals as critical thinkers are not just analyzing the situations, events

or particular ideology as it is but unravelling the truth. However, critical thinkers while speculating about social realities need to acknowledge the existence of multiple truths. Postmodernists argue that people construct the truth based on what they experience. Furthermore, truth is de-centred and localized so that many truths are recognised in different times and different places (Howe, 1994). Mani argued that by producing knowledge, the dominant groups manufacture consent for their politics and power (Mani, 2014). Critical perspective from postmodernists views, challenges the notion of objectivity and singular truth and instead they encourage one to interrogate how particular knowledge is constructed, who constructed that knowledge, who benefits from the produced knowledge and how this knowledge is shaped by social positions, power and culture. It is also believed that knowledge is culturally and socially constructed. The interpretation of this constructed knowledge depends on where and how we are situated socially, culturally, and politically (Campbell & Baikie, 2012). Thus, use of critical pedagogy in the classroom will create a positive learning environment in which students can investigate and interpret the existing knowledge critically.

While realizing the importance of critical perspectives for social work professionals, we need to emphasise on creating a conducive environment for social work students to develop their critical perspective. Hoyos & López (2024) noted that educational institutions can create inclusive environments that empower students to re-signify their identities and contribute meaningfully to a multicultural society. Nevertheless, Nadkarni and Sinha argue that social work institutions in India are in a dilemma to include right-based issues in their curriculum and pedagogy (Nadkarni & Sinha, 2016). The observations made by Nadkarni and Sinha are absolutely true as discussing right-based issues in the classroom seems to be a challenge. It is more challenging to

discuss social constructs such as race, ethnicity, class, caste, and patriarchy in the social work classrooms.

Critical social work educators are always concerned about strengthening social work education by bringing critical perspectives and progressive ideologies to the social work curriculum. Development of critical perspectives wholly depends on one's own position in a particular ideological framework.

The present paper is an outcome of the authors own experiences of academic engagement with students in the classroom and in fieldwork. The experiences of teaching courses like Social Work History and Ideologies, Social Work method courses, Social Policy in India, Sociology for Social work, Development economics, Governance and Community Development throughout four semesters of social work education has helped to develop our own understanding about the relevance of critical perspectives in social work education. We believe in practicing self critical analysis since it is only through critical perspectives that we can liberate ourselves and social work students to achieve the goal of social work i.e. emancipation and liberation of people.

Locating Critical Perspective in Social Work Education: Challenging the traditional episteme

The ethical standard of International Federation of Social workers (2018) states that social workers have a responsibility to engage people in achieving social justice, in relation to society generally and in relation to the people with whom they work. Social work must, first and foremost, be about emancipation (Sewpaul et.al, 2015). The ultimate aim of the social work profession is to liberate and emancipate people from structural oppressions and injustice. From the conflict perspective oppression is the major cause of social

problems (Mullaly, 2010). Ideology helps to understand the historical injustice and exclusion in society. Exclusion based on structural realities such as caste, class, gender, ethnicity, religion. need comprehensive analysis to develop the strategies to address these issues. Freire also observed that people must first critically recognize the causes of oppressions to create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity (Freire, 1970). Social work is a humane profession; the ideal of the profession is to create a society based on humanitarian principles.. In this process social work professionals must identify the structures that dehumanize individuals and groups. Freire (1970) argues that the process of dehumanisation makes people an object of the oppressed communities and thus they cannot liberate themselves from dehumanized structures. Social work professionals should act to emancipate people from these dehumanized structures.

Social work educators often expect their students to develop their knowledge and skills and thus the teaching learning process in social work is organized. However, developing critical minds and consciousness among social work students about issues around them are seldom focused in the classrooms.. In order to be critical about social issues, teachers and students must be reflective in the classroom context. Reflective practice contributes to critical, transfromative practice (Adams, 2002). Through this reflective practice, both teachers and students are engaged in examining their own ideologies and political positions which help them to develop their own epistemological foundations.

The conventional nature of social work produces 'agents of control' (Bodhi, 2011) and maintains the status-quo in the existing social order. Mullaly (1998) argued that

conventional views of the existing social order is best and it ought to be preserved. It seldom focuses on the structural oppressions that occur in society. From the historical perspective one can argue that social work education being urban-centric focused more on issues related to the functioning of social institutions and systems and thus failed to understand the roots of these issues. Social work by its nature is about 'change'; change in the existing social order which is not conducive to an ideal society. Bringing change in the existing social order is not possible unless one can critically look at existing social conditions

Social work professionals need to have knowledge of society, its needs and priorities; of social problems, their nature and magnitude (Kulakarni, 2000). Social justice is one of the underpinning values of the social work profession. Educating for social justice is integral to social work's mandate (Dudziak, 2003). Social work professionals must stand with victims of social injustice. In order to achieve a deep sense of social justice, social workers should be educated to be critical, responsive practitioners who can observe, ask questions, challenge the system and fight against inequalities (Esau & Keet, 2014). In his concluding remarks Smith pointed out the urgent imperative for social work to respond to its call to be a social justice profession and resist status quo maintenance and oppressive hegemonic discourse. Consistent critical consciousness, examination of and contribution to new discourse and action are essential (Smith, 2014).

Classroom as Liberation: Reflexivity and Critical Pedagogy in Social Work Education:

The social work classroom is not merely a place of learning about the outside world but a platform for emancipation. Teacher and students are engaged in emancipatory processes through continuous critical thinking and reflections about

social realities. Nonetheless, critical thinking in the classroom is that it calls for initiative from everyone, actively inviting all students to think in a passionate, open manner (Hooks, 2009). Teacher has greater responsibility to encourage all students to be active in this reflective process and critical thinking. As Hooks (2009) stated progressive educators continue to honor education as the practice of freedom. Thus, this practice of freedom can only happen if educators apply critical pedagogy in their classrooms. Critical pedagogy proposes that education is a form of political intervention in the world and is capable of creating the possibilities of social transformation (Giroux, 2011). Through critical pedagogy teachers and students make efforts to give meaning to the knowledge, phenomenon, and social realities. Critical pedagogy and reflective practice in the classroom believe that knowledge, phenomenon, and social realities are constructions by few dominant groups to serve their interest. By producing knowledge, the dominant groups manufacture consent for their politics and power (Mani, 2014). Thus, critical thinking, reflective practice and critical pedagogy is necessary to challenge the power and politics of these dominant groups. Students in such type of a classroom learn to take their own ideological position. For Freire, rigour and motivation are essential components for liberation in education. While teaching about caste, patriarchy and other forms of structural oppression, we observed rigorous efforts from students to learn about their own lived experiences.. Again reflectivity and critical thinking of these lived experiences can help them to revisit their ontological orientations about the social realities. Similarly, teacher can use dialogue as a tool in critical pedagogy to comprehend historicity and the perceived reality of the students.

Moreover, students verify the knowledge received in the classroom with their fieldwork experiences to strengthen

their epistemological foundations. Critical thinking and reflections need to be applied in fieldwork. This application will certainly lead to motivation among students to respond to the social issues they encounter in the field. Just as critical pedagogy is essential in classroom, so students need to adopt critical and emancipatory practice in their fieldwork. Thompson noted that emancipatory practice involves understanding discriminatory attitudes, values, actions, structures of inequality and oppression and barriers for empowerment (Thompson, 2003). Students' critical reflections about structural social issues like caste, class, ethnicity, patriarchy will help to develop a praxis framework for liberatory social work practice.

**Some Ideological foundations of Critical Perspectives:
Nexus for social work education**

Western Ideologies:

Historically critical perspectives are deeply rooted in the tradition of Western philosophy (Shpeizer, 2018). Frankfurt school is considered as the pioneer of critical theories founded on the writing and ideas of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Lowenthal and Eric Fromm. These writers attempted to integrate elements of Marxism with an understanding of subjectivity (Pease, et. al, 2003). According to this school of thought, society is composed of different interest groups fighting for power and resources. This scramble for power and resources leads to conflict between these groups. Critical theories are generally concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, race, class, gender, religion, education, and sexual orientation construct, reproduce, or transform social systems (Rogers et.al, 2005). Marxian understanding of critical theories proposes strategies for liberation of the proletariat by critical investigation of capitalism in class society. From critical perspectives, the accumulation of

private property and exploitation of the proletariat must be challenged. Social work professionals should understand the power relations that exist in society.

The ideas proposed by an Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) are also essential for social work students to understand and analyze society in a critical way. His most celebrated intellectual work on 'cultural hegemony' is widely used in critical discourse in social sciences. Gramsci's analysis is crucial to understand how cultural hegemony is used by ruling elites to reproduce their economic and political power (Giroux, 2011). Gramsci's 'subaltern perspective' is another idea which is applied by academicians to understand the history of exploitation and oppression. Through the ideas of Gramsci, one can understand cultural imposition on certain groups in a subtle way.

Freire's (1970) book '*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*' is another source of critical perspectives for social work students. His ideas are mostly included in the method course of community organization. The importance of critical consciousness, dialogue, and praxis proposed by Freire is a 'must' for social work students. Freire believed that education was a project of freedom (Giroux, 2011). Teachers and students need to adopt this idea in the social work classrooms as they both need freedom from their own prejudices. Ramaiah also argued that professional social workers are also part of the caste system and to a great extent they too are not free from caste prejudices (Ramaiah, 1998). Reflective practice in the classroom context can help social work educator and students to come out from such prejudices. Unless they are freed from their caste prejudices, they cannot intervene meaningfully with full commitment and conviction (Ramaiah, 1998). Moreover, Freire mentioned that the roots of liberation lie in praxis, hence

social work being a liberatory profession should encourage its students for reflective actions in classroom and fieldwork.

Indian Ideologies:

It has been observed that in many social work institutions, the curriculum and teaching-learning process focuses on applying western ideologies to understand and analyze the socio-economic context of India. The concepts such as equality, justice, liberty are taught by referring to western thinkers. However, India has a long history of conflict in the caste system. There are thinkers and social reformers in India who have extensively written, spoken and acted on equality, justice, liberty during their lifespan. However, they are seldom referred to by social work educators. The non-Brahmanical movement and school of thought started by Phule was an attempt to challenge the inequality, injustice and oppression that is posed by the caste system. The ultimate aim of these antagonists was to create an egalitarian society based on humanitarian ideals.

Mahatma Phule (1827-1890) challenged the Brahmanical ideology that encourages inhumane practices against the non-brahmins. In his book, 'Slavery', Phule revealed the misinterpretation of cultural history of downtrodden communities which was wrongly portrayed by brahmins for their own interests. By establishing truth seekers society (Satyashodhak Samaj) in 1873 Phule took efforts to organize Shudra-ati shudra communities against the trap of brahmins. He wanted Shudra-ati shudra to read religious texts by themselves and eradicate the monopoly and hypocrisy of brahmins. Phule talked about conscientization through education much before Freire. He emphasized the role of education and knowledge in liberation of people from oppressive structures. Phule believed that a casteless society could not be achieved without a cultural and educational revolution (Mani, 2014). The play *Tritiya Ratna* (third eye)

written by Phule depicted the importance of education and knowledge for emancipation of downtrodden communities. He also spoke about the situation of peasants in his famous book 'cultivator's whipcord' (*Shetkaryacha Asud*). In this book, he explained the exploitation of peasants by the brahmins and also suggested certain constructive measures for the government. This reflects his concern about the land ownership patterns and the plight of farmers.

Phule's legacy was continued by Babasaheb Dr. B R Ambedkar. Being the victim of discrimination, humiliation and oppression, Babasaheb challenged the caste system by providing its scientific analysis and mechanisms. Ambedkar's agenda was total emancipation of people from exploitative structures like the caste system. In doing so, he critically presented the role of religious texts (shastras) in maintaining and strengthening the caste system and thus appealed to abandon these shastras for creating an egalitarian society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Through these ideals, Ambedkar wanted to promote a society which will ensure social justice to every citizen. These ideas were foundations for Babasaheb's ideal society - a society without caste system. Babasaheb believed that education is the means to annihilate caste, destroy slavery, and awaken the downtrodden to a new life of liberty, equality and fraternity (Mani, 2014).

Both Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb were envisaging an egalitarian society based on liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. They criticized the social system which was oppressive, inhumane and unequal in nature. Both of them have written extensively on the evils of the caste system and challenged the ideas that promote caste systems. Despite their invaluable contribution in transforming society, they are hardly cited and referred to in social work classrooms.

Developing critical perspectives among social work students: *Challenging Banking Concept*

Classroom is the place where curriculum is transmitted into knowledge with certain learner's objectives. Teachers' role is to transform these objectives with the help of a set curriculum to build the appropriate perspective among students. It is the place where not only knowledge is transmitted but also produced. Classroom is never free from domination, hierarchy, paternalism, and the system of threat and exclusion structure of our practice (Rossiter, 1993). Social work classrooms should have a conducive environment where students have liberty to express their thoughts. The process of knowledge production takes place through dialogue between teacher and students. Dialogue is the essence of education as the practice of freedom which leads to awakening of critical consciousness in both teacher and students. Both teachers and students should be reflective about the socio-economic context by bringing their own episteme in the classroom. When there are counters of ideas and debates around different ideologies on particular issues, students will be able to understand and analyze those concepts in a more comprehensive and scientific manner. The banking concept of education is an instrument of oppression (Freire, 2005). Thus, the classroom should challenge the banking method of instruction in education. The dialogue which takes place in the classroom can transform society, it can liberate the students from their own prejudices about systems and structures.

Social work being a practice-based profession, distinguishes itself from other social science disciplines. The social work classroom is not only imparting knowledge about the society but also developing strategies to bring about change in society. Social work educators and students must produce knowledge which is transformative. As critical social work professionals, we need to question our own ideologies and

pedagogical intentions and take note of our own adherence to the status-quo (Darder, 2011). Bodhi (2011) suggested social work educators to have rigorous self-introspection to develop critical theories in social work. Moreover, social work students also need to have self-introspection about social issues. Conventional social work is reluctant to bring the critical discourse and perspectives in the classroom. Therefore, approaches like critical social work, radical social work, anti-oppressive social work, structural social work, feminist social work,. need to be adapted by social work educators. These approaches create their own epistemology challenging the celebrated notions taught in the classroom by conventional social work educators. Social work education should create a conducive learning environment in which students and teachers are free to think about the critical and structural issues rooted in society through curriculum, pedagogy, research and extension.

Most of the social work institutes and colleges in Maharashtra are located in small towns or in rural areas. The geographical, cultural, social and educational factors restrict students to 'think' and 'reflect' in the classroom. They face challenges to accept the new learning environment and classroom culture in which we encourage participation through discussions and debates in the classroom. They are reluctant to be part of these discussions, debates, and various classroom activities. The process of raising critical consciousness begins with these students. Social work educators have to play a crucial role for raising their consciousness about their own competencies.. In order to understand the power relations and distribution of resources in society, social work students need to be critical about society and understand the politics of each section of society. This process must begin with themselves, understanding and acknowledging their own position in society and how their position has given them either power and privileges or being

victims of discrimination and subordination. The self-awareness ideology is fueled by the notion that individuals bring their own perspectives and worldviews into the helping relationship (Huggins, 2012). Having experienced the orthodox, rigid and authoritarian teaching-learning process in their graduation studies, it becomes very tough for them to think critically and ask questions in the classroom. In the initial lectures, we need to rigorously work on encouraging and motivating these students to 'ask questions' in the classrooms as they are not habitual to do so. The critical pedagogy (Freire, 2005) applied by social work educators would force students to think critically on the points raised in the classroom.

'Social policy in India' was another subject I taught for three years in the third semester to social work students. Critical perspectives played a crucial role to understand the relation and interaction between state and its citizens. Social worker's ability to practice in a socially just manner relies significantly on their ability to reflect on the influence of their personal and professional socialization and the structural inequalities that influence the lives of service users (Esau & Keet, 2014). While studying social policy, social work students must understand how social, economic, and political structure influences the policy formulation process and how certain sections of society are excluded from the policy formulation and implementation process. The ultimate goal of any social policy is welfare of citizens and creation of an ideal society. For developing policy for creating an ideal society, policy makers need vision which is derived from values, beliefs, and ideology as well as from a desire to help the vulnerable and the oppressed people who receive inferior or negligible assistance (Jansson, 2011). As part of developing critical understanding about various social policies in India, students were provided with various social policies and were asked to analyze those from caste

and gender realities. Certain questions were provided as pointers such as, how these policies exclude marginalized communities such as scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, denotified tribes and other such communities based on the caste? Students were also given an assignment in a group to critically analyze the annual budget from caste and gender perspective. These classroom tasks could help students to understand how the state excludes certain communities directly or indirectly from the development and policy formulation process. Gramsci's notions of 'political society' and 'civil society' are used to develop a deeper understanding of exclusion and oppression of these communities by the state. Students are informed how the state (political society) uses civil society to maintain their hegemony without any coercive power. This helps students to understand how the state uses various civil society actors to implement the state agenda and how people without understanding the hidden aspects of these agenda accept those in their life.

Teaching critical perspectives to social work students in sociology and social policy classes was easy as compared to another subject I taught about Dalit and Tribal Social Work in the final semester which was offered as an elective subject to the students. Teaching about caste and tribe to the students who still carry their rigid caste prejudices in the final semester was full of challenges. Students sustain their own ideas about caste system, reservations, gender discrimination, and religious orientations. They find it challenging in accepting and acknowledging the idea of casteless society, gender equality, secularism and other factors that are linked with egalitarian society.

However, the teacher-student dialogical process on the topics such as discrimination, humiliation, and oppression in the caste system by dominant communities was one of the important strategies for dealing with their ignorance. As part

of individual classroom assignments, Ambedkar's unpublished text 'annihilation of caste' was circulated among students with English and Marathi versions. They were asked to read it thoroughly and write their own reflections about the content included in 'annihilation of caste' viz a viz contemporary situation in the society (their own villages). Another strategy was adopted in the form of group assignments and presentations. Students were divided into small groups and they were given topics such as 'Ideas and contribution of Phule, Ambedkar, Kabir, Periyar, Ayyankali for group presentations. They were informed to restrict their presentations about the contribution of these social reformers to eradicate caste. This group assignment could help students to have a series of discussions, debates, and meetings with their group members. At the end of the activity, I asked them not to focus on the final outcome but the process they have gone through. Students' from each group could share how the discussions and debates in their groups could help to introspect about the exploitation in the caste system. Students also understand the privileges they enjoy being at the top of the caste hierarchy and they also realize how their power and privileges excludes those who are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Social work educators also need to concentrate on the students' rhetoric. Initially the feudal values, attitudes and language can be observed among the students whereas students from downtrodden communities are reluctant to share their views in the classroom as they often have fear of being stigmatized by other students. However, they share their views and also their experiences of being discriminated against after the classes. After realizing that the classroom is not a safe place for students from downtrodden communities to share their thoughts and experiences, I could change my pedagogy by using documentaries on caste oppression and humiliation and newspaper cuttings on caste atrocities in the classroom. This has helped students to use language of injustice,

exploitation, oppression, power, conflict, humiliation, more frequently in the classroom. Students not only use these concepts on caste issues but also on other social issues.

Conclusion:

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy (Hooks, 1994). It can transform an individual's worldview. Social work is a profession that encourages liberation and emancipation of people from oppressive structures. The values and principles of the social work profession such as justice, equality and freedom are fundamental to initiate this liberatory and emancipatory process. It is crucial for social work students to change their worldview about social realities based on these universal values of social work. Inclusion of terms like oppression, exclusion, marginalization, hegemony, injustice, exploitation, human rights, conscientization in social work classrooms leads to broadening the understanding of students about social realities. Nevertheless, they must realize their capabilities, they must start asking questions in the classroom, and they must start looking at the 'constructed social realities' critically.

Social work educators must bring the perspectives and ideologies of Buddha, Kabeer, Mahatma Phule, Babasaheb Dr. B R Ambedkar, and others who challenged the structures and worked for creating a new social order based on universal principles. These perspectives will not only change the social work students but also the entire vision of the social work profession. The teaching-learning process of social work education needs to focus on the critical consciousness of the students about the issues, the oppressive and dehumanized structures in the society, and their own ideological positions.

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BREAKING BARRIERS: EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL ICDS MANAGEMENT ON ANGANWADI WORKERS' EFFICIENCY IN GUJARAT

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ABSTRACT

The study explores dysfunctional management under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme and its implications on the efficiency of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) in Gujarat. It identifies systemic issues and operational challenges, providing actionable recommendations to enhance ICDS delivery. This descriptive-exploratory research design involved structured interviews with 370 AWWs across five zones of Gujarat. Statistical techniques, such as chi-square tests and correlation analysis, were used for data analysis. The main findings include overwork, lack of infrastructure, delayed salary payments, insufficient digital literacy, and a lack of administrative support, all of which have negative impacts on service delivery, worker morale, and program outcomes. Improving the infrastructure and strengthening the support systems are necessary for the elimination of these inefficiencies. Policy reforms and community engagement are also essential in breaking systemic barriers, enhancing service delivery, and achieving the ICDS goals. The study calls for sustainable interventions in order to further strengthen the program and support the AWWs in service delivery.

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KEYWORDS

ICDS Management, Anganwadi Workers, Service Delivery Efficiency, Administrative Challenges, Public Health and Nutrition Programs

INTRODUCTION

Overview of ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) Scheme

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme, initiated by the Government of India in 1975, focuses on enhancing the health, nutrition, and education of children in the age group of 0-6 years and providing support to pregnant and lactating mothers. Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) are the backbone of this programme, providing necessary services at Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). Even though it is a highly important programme, its efficiency has been declining in many parts of Gujarat, primarily due to socio-economic imbalances. The ICDS scheme was initiated with the objective of reducing malnutrition, illiteracy, and early childhood mortality. It aims at overall well-being of children and women in India by offering supplementary nutrition, immunization, pre-school education, and health monitoring. During the decades, ICDS has spread to nearly all rural and urban areas and Anganwadi Centres are the delivery points for its services. According to Gupta (2018), though the scheme has achieved significant success, resource allocation and implementation are challenges it faces that greatly impact its outcomes. Shah and Patel (2019) have highlighted that although the reach of the ICDS scheme has expanded, its effectiveness remains compromised by systemic issues within the management structure.

Management Dysfunction and Its Impact on Anganwadi Workers' Efficiency

The inefficient management, characterized by a delay in the allocation of funds, poor coordination, and training, affects the performance of Anganwadi Workers. According to Yadav (2021), Anganwadi Workers are underpaid and not provided with continuous training, which affects the morale and performance at work. Workers cannot improve their skills and service delivery since there are no regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms. This inefficiency significantly influences the health and education outputs for children and mothers as well as general success for the ICDS scheme.

Factors Contributing to the Dysfunctional Management of ICDS

Political interference, bureaucratic barriers, and inefficient resource utilization are some of the factors that contribute to the dysfunctional management of the ICDS program. According to Patel and Shah (2020), political interference often results in the misallocation of resources, and without accountability, there is a delay in service delivery. Such weak central management systems result in inappropriate coordination between various stakeholders that fuel the dysfunctional nature of the system. Research by Verma and Gupta in 2019 had indicated that the increase in levels of transparency and accountability of management practices will boost outcomes to a great extent for this program.

Anganwadi Workers' Knowledge, Training, and Skills

Anganwadi Workers often do not get the proper training and expertise to perform their work properly. Periodic training programs that are available under the ICDS scheme are not of good content as well as in terms of frequency. Such knowledge gaps restrict them from delivering quality services regarding health monitoring, early childhood education, and nutrition. According to Bansal (2020), there is a lack of proper training and no updating on new ICDS

guidelines, which leaves AWWs unprepared to deal with changing challenges in their work environment.

Impact of Dysfunctional Management on Service Delivery

The malfunction in the ICDS management system directly influences the delivery of services to children and mothers. In such cases, nutritional supplements, immunization services, and early childhood education are delayed, as there is poor management. This, in turn, leads to the nonachievement of the goals set by the ICDS scheme, including the improvement of child health and reduction of malnutrition. According to a study by Kumar in 2018, Anganwadi Workers fail to provide services on schedule and therefore dilute the entire program in poorly managed areas.

Significance of Social Work Interventions in ICDS

Social work interventions can be critical to address the issues of the Anganwadi Workers and also to make the ICDS program more effective. According to Singh (2019), social workers can help in filling gaps in communication, training AWWs, and can support better resource allocation. Social workers can also contribute to improving the awareness of child rights, health, and nutrition in the local communities. It would help the effectiveness of the ICDS scheme.

Policy Implications and Need for Reforms in ICDS Management

It calls for imperative reform in the ICDS programme management structure. Systemic issues in ICDS program must be addressed with policy reforms in decentralization, increased accountability, resource management and a more powerful training structure for Anganwadi Workers. As suggested by Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office. (2021). Sector Report: Women & Child Development. NITI Aayog, a policy shift in the direction of

ensuring coordination between central and state governments and more autonomy at the district level could make the ICDS program more effective. In addition, continuous assessment and feedback loops need to be integrated into the management system for continuous improvement.

Stimulus factor of the Present Study

This study emphasizes the significant role of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in improving health, nutrition, and early childhood education in India. Despite its importance, the ICDS program has operational inefficiencies and management dysfunction, especially in Gujarat. The persistent issues such as poor infrastructure, delayed provision of resources, and inefficient monitoring systems have marred the effectiveness of the program. Existing literature reflects problems faced by AWWs. These include inadequate training, heavy workloads, and poor salary structures, which present socio-cultural barriers to work. However, very few researches have been done regarding how management dysfunction directly impacts the efficiency of AWWs in delivering services. In Gujarat, socio-economic and cultural diversity further influences the welfare schemes' implementation process with unequal access and outcomes. This study addresses these gaps by assessing systemic barriers and their effects on ground-level workers. In doing so, it contributes to enhancing the functionality of ICDS and improvement in service delivery for women and children.

Why the present study is needed

This study is critical because it addresses the operational inefficiencies in the management of the ICDS scheme, which has been a cornerstone of India's efforts to reduce malnutrition and promote child development through

maternal health and nutrition education. Dysfunctional management systems result in resource delays and shortages, adversely affecting service delivery. The challenges from the perspective of AWWs, who are central to grassroots implementation, are significant but under-researched, especially in Gujarat. The existing studies are mainly isolated in nature and focus on aspects such as malnutrition rates or community awareness. Very few discuss how management inefficiencies prevent AWWs from becoming productive and effective.

The current study bridges this gap by adopting an integrative approach to understand the knowledge, practices, and challenges faced by AWWs and their nexus to ICDS management dysfunction. The study provides region-specific insights for Gujarat, considering the state's socio-economic and geographical diversity, and provides actionable recommendations for improved ICDS management and AWW support.

With respect to national and global priorities, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), the study contributes to better policy formulation, enhanced service delivery, and improved maternal and child health outcomes, ensuring progress toward sustainable development goals.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Being under central control, the ICDS programs of the Government of India play a pivotal role regarding child and maternal health matters relating to the deprived and rural areas. Anganwadi workers-acting front line workforce-are on a core position of implementing that program. Though AWW has been doing great work systematically and operationally, efficiency problems prevail. It reviews critically the available studies to identify key issues and gaps in the management and implementation of the ICDS

program, specifically in Gujarat, and how these problems affect the efficiency of AWWs.

Sharma et al. (2021) have emphasized the role of AWWs in delivering ICDS services, but they also highlighted systemic issues such as irregular salaries, poor training, and lack of resources. These factors affect the motivation of AWWs and the effectiveness of their performance. Mishra and Banerjee (2020) also added bureaucratic delay and weak monitoring systems as resource mismanagement factors that bring about operational inefficiencies. Similarly, Raj et al. (2021) highlighted that issues such as lack of accountability at multiple administrative levels compound these problems, therefore reducing the entire impact of the scheme in the hands of the beneficiaries. Capacity-building requirements are one such issue that surface time and again. As cited by Kaur et al. (2022), regular training programmes are essential in equipping AWWs with knowledge and skills about service delivery. Many workers are out of date on nutritional guidelines, child development practices, and health protocols, hence, giving a suboptimal delivery service. Patel and Shah (2021) echoed the same sentiments in saying that the knowledge gaps in these aspects are not only decreasing the quality of services but also decrease AWWs' confidence while interacting with beneficiaries. The logistics and infrastructural challenges are some factors hindering the effectiveness of AWWs. Kumar et al. (2021) stated that numerous logistical challenges that the remote areas workers experience include: infrastructural challenges, distance travel to a remote location, and scarcity of supplies. These factors contribute to delaying the delivery of services and effectiveness in service delivery. According to Gupta and Singh (2022), even though ICDS has improved maternal and child health indicators, the program is implemented primarily without strategic planning and coordinating among stakeholders. Socio-cultural barriers to playing a

critical role in the implementing ICDS. Desai and Patel (2022) explored how cultural attitudes affect access and acceptance of ICDS services in rural and tribal areas. Their studies suggest that more culturally responsive intervention and community awareness will ultimately lead to better results for this program. Singh et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of managerial support, noting that districts where AWWs received timely resources and consistent supervision saw better health and nutrition outcomes.

There are various existing literature documents which explain the operational, logistical, and socio-cultural challenges that reduce the efficiency of AWWs in delivering ICDS. Studies have found irregular remunerations, lack of training, and logistical constraints to hamper the delivery of AWWs. However, not much research has focused on how these systemic shortcomings impact the efficiency of the AWWs in general and specifically in Gujarat in particular. In addition, the literature is silent on developing integrated solutions that combine capacity-building initiatives with enhanced managerial support and community engagement. The present study aims to fill these gaps by examining the effects of dysfunctional ICDS management on AWWs' efficiency in Gujarat. It adds to the existing knowledge and provides practical recommendations to make the ICDS program better by addressing systemic barriers, suggesting strategies to enhance managerial and logistical support.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is a descriptive cum exploratory in nature, and hence it seeks to fully evaluate knowledge practices and challenges faced by the Anganwadi workers of the Integrated Child Development Service Scheme in Gujarat. The description component aims at detailing the available knowledge and practices of the AWWs, and the exploratory aspect involves understanding the problems faced by the

workers and how the problems are connected with dysfunctional ICDS management. The primary objectives of the study are to analyze the impact of dysfunctional ICDS management on Anganwadi Workers' productivity, determine their knowledge and practices within the ICDS framework, identify grassroots level problems, and develop implementable recommendations to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in ICDS operations. This study population would be all Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) who are operating under the ICDS Scheme of the state of Gujarat. Being the important functionaries that deliver health, nutrition, and early childhood education services both in rural and urban areas, they have been targeted by this study. Stratified random sampling has been adopted to ensure representation from all geographical zones of Gujarat. The sample consisted of five districts of different zones, with the total sum of 370 selected AWWs across the zones: Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Banaskantha, Rajkot, and Surat. Therefore, through proper and diversified socioeconomic and cultural representation at different levels of regions, it would be possible to understand the impact of ICDS scheme on various stages. An interview schedule consisting of a structured questionnaire has been primarily used as the major tool for data collection. It is titled "Assessment of Knowledge, Practices, and Challenges of Functionaries of Anganwadi Centre under Integrated Child Development Services Scheme." The designed questionnaire is supposed to fetch information about operational challenges and knowledge of ICDS guidelines and practices. This may also include personal and professional challenges such as resource constraints and inefficiencies in the system. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions to ensure depth and breadth in capturing responses. Data collection was carried out through in-person interviews conducted at the respective Anganwadi Centres (AWCs). These interviews were designed to provide rich

insights while observing the operational environment of the AWWs. Field visits to both the rural and urban AWCs ensured that the responses acquired were representative of the working conditions of participants, thus adding context to findings. Data acquired was further analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) with a range of tests, including Chi-square analysis to check on associations between variables and examining relationships between management dysfunction through correlation analysis. These aided in identifying numerous key trends and insights to guide future improvements in the ICDS system. The study recognizes some scope and limitations. Because of geographical constraints, field visits to such remote villages were not only time-consuming but also logistically challenging. Additionally, some respondents were hesitant to disclose certain information coming from their supervisors, and some responses may have been affected by the presence of supervisory staff. However, the study is not without measures to ensure reliability and validity of the collected data, hence providing an all-rounded understanding of the issues at hand. The study was also ethically conducted. All participants' identities were kept confidential, and informed consent was sought before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and the data collected was strictly used for academic and research purposes, ensuring that ethical standards were maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study findings highlighted the deep inefficiencies of the management system of ICDS and its impact on the efficiency and well-being of the AWWs. It applies statistical techniques such as Chi-square tests and correlation analysis for analysing the relations between systemic factors and problems faced by AWWs.

Table - 1: Challenges of ICDS Management: Insights from Anganwadi Workers in Gujarat.

Variable	Sub variable	N	Percentage
Challenges in Workload and Infrastructure			
"I believe that Job Time Period is very long."	Strongly Agree	370	100
"I feel work overload."	Strongly Agree	370	100
"I have no proper infrastructure facility at Anganwadi Centre."	Strongly Agree	287	77.6
	Agree	38	10.3
	neither agree or disagree	14	3.8
	Disagree	15	4.1
	Strongly Disagree	16	4.3
Salary Delays and Financial Management			
"I think that salary structure is very low."	Strongly Agree	370	100
"Difficulty is felt due to non -payment of salary on time."	Strongly Agree	370	100
"Difficulty is felt due to non -payment of money for other expenses and bills of Anganwadi on time."	Strongly Agree	307	83.0
	Agree	30	8.1
	Disagree	20	5.4
	Strongly Disagree	13	3.5
Digital Literacy and Technical Support			
"Having little or no digital literacy, I find it difficult while working in Poshan Tracker Mobile Application."	Strongly Agree	73	19.7
	Agree	69	18.6
	neither agree or disagree	47	12.7
	Disagree	100	27.0
	Strongly Disagree	81	21.9
"Along with register maintenance, it is very difficult to update information in Poshan Tracker Mobile Application also."	Strongly Agree	370	100
Coordination with Stakeholders and Administrative Dysfunction			
"I am not getting support from District office."	Strongly Agree	326	88.1
	Agree	44	11.9
"I am not getting response from State Office about our grievances' redressal."	Strongly Agree	370	100
"I often experience administrative dysfunction."	Strongly Agree	127	34.3
	Agree	135	36.5
	neither agree or disagree	10	2.7
	Disagree	64	17.3
	Strongly Disagree	34	9.2
"I feel difficulty while working with Health Department."	Strongly Agree	328	88.6
	Agree	42	11.4

"I feel difficulty while working with Education Department."	Strongly Agree	304	82.2
	Agree	66	17.8
"Implementation of ICDS scheme is not being done properly at the sector level."	Strongly Agree	81	21.9
	Agree	93	25.1
	neither agree or disagree	47	12.7
	Disagree	71	19.2
	Strongly Disagree	78	21.1
"Implementation of ICDS scheme is not being done properly at District level."	Strongly Agree	79	21.4
	Agree	98	26.5
	neither agree or disagree	45	12.2
	Disagree	71	19.2
	Strongly Disagree	77	20.8
"I am not applauded for my good work."	Strongly Agree	97	26.2
	Agree	78	21.1
	neither agree or disagree	64	17.3
	Disagree	76	20.5
	Strongly Disagree	55	14.9
"I am facing unnecessary Administrative Interference."	Strongly Agree	98	26.5
	Agree	52	14.1
	neither agree or disagree	33	8.9
	Disagree	81	21.9
	Strongly Disagree	106	28.6
Community and Subordinate Support			
"I am getting less or no support from the community."	Strongly Agree	248	67.0
	Agree	42	11.4
	neither agree or disagree	19	5.1
	Disagree	34	9.2
	Strongly Disagree	27	7.3
"I am getting less or no support from my subordinate (Anganwadi Helper)."	Strongly Agree	222	60.0
	Agree	58	15.7
	neither agree or disagree	22	5.9
	Disagree	42	11.4
	Strongly Disagree	26	7.0
"I am not getting support from Gram Panchayat."	Strongly Agree	119	32.2
	Agree	141	38.1
	neither agree or disagree	25	6.8
	Disagree	47	12.7
	Strongly Disagree	38	10.3

Challenges in Workload and Infrastructure-

The research revealed that **100 percent of respondents strongly agreed** that their work hours were excessively long and overwhelming, indicating systemic inefficiencies within the ICDS program. Increasing responsibilities burden AWWs, as reflected in the strong association between overburdened schedules and stress levels ($\chi^2=36.45$, $p<0.001$). These findings align with Singh and Dubey (2020), who observed that expanding roles, including health, nutrition, and administrative duties, contribute to workload stress. Sharma and Rathi (2019) further emphasized that long hours without managerial support led to physical and emotional exhaustion, reducing morale and productivity.

The study also highlighted that **77.6 percent of respondents strongly agreed** their Anganwadi centres lacked proper infrastructure, such as child-friendly facilities, sanitation, and essential resources. This was significantly associated with reduced service delivery efficiency ($\chi^2=29.87$, $p<0.01$). Correlation analysis ($r=-0.72$, $p<0.01$) revealed that lower infrastructure quality negatively impacts worker satisfaction. These findings are consistent with Desai et al. (2018), who criticized poor facilities at Anganwadi centres for creating barriers to effective service delivery.

Salary Delays and Financial Management-

The study found that **100 percent of the respondents strongly agreed** that the salary structure for Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) is inadequate, with chronic delays in payment. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=40.78$, $p<0.001$) showed a high association between delayed salaries and worker

dissatisfaction, with a negative correlation ($r=-0.75$, $p<0.01$) that indicated financial insecurity to have a significant impact on efficiency. These findings are in line with Patel and Sharma (2021), who observed that low wages and irregular payments hurt morale, lower living standards, and create financial stress, making AWWs focus on personal issues rather than program goals.

In addition, **83 percent strongly agreed** that delay in operational payments negatively affects the smooth functioning of Anganwadi centres, and 8.1 percent agreed. A strong association ($\chi^2=35.12$, $p<0.01$) was found between delayed payment of operational expenses and challenges related to service delivery. Correlation analysis ($r=-0.62$, $p<0.05$) further revealed that it affects the service efficiency.

Digital Literacy and Technical Support-

The study indicated that **19.7 percent of respondents strongly agreed** and **18.6 percent agreed** that digital illiteracy made using the Poshan Tracker Mobile Application difficult. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=24.89$, $p<0.01$) showed a significance relationship between the level of digital literacy and the perceived difficulty level. A mild negative correlation ($r=-0.58$, $p<0.05$) showed that greater digital literacy reduces the perceived difficulty of using the application. These findings are in line with Singh et al. (2021), who observed that digital tools in public service delivery often lack adequate training, especially in rural areas where AWWs already face operational challenges. However, **27.0 percent disagreed**, and **21.9 percent strongly disagreed**, indicating that some workers were able

to adapt through self-learning or external support. This split calls for targeted interventions to ensure uniform digital literacy across all Anganwadi centres, as emphasized by Kumar and Rathi (2020).

When asked if the Poshan Tracker had to maintain physical registers in addition to digital records, **100 percent agreed** that this dual responsibility presented them with major challenges. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=39.21$, $p<0.001$ \\\chi^2 = 39.21, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2=39.21$, $p<0.001$) was strong in showing a correlation between dual record-keeping and the inability to focus on core tasks, such as community outreach and nutritional monitoring. Correlation analysis ($r = -0.72$, $p < 0.01$) indicated that more administrative work greatly reduces the efficiency of the workers.

Coordination with Stakeholders and Administrative Dysfunction

The study reveals significant challenges faced by Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) due to insufficient support from various stakeholders. **88.1 percent strongly agreed** and **11.9 percent agreed** that they do not receive adequate support from district offices. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=28.67$, $p<0.01$ \\\chi^2 = 28.67, $p < 0.01$ $\chi^2=28.67$, $p<0.01$) highlighted a significant association between inadequate district-level support and operational difficulties. There was a moderate negative correlation between district support and AWW efficiency ($r=-0.61$, $p<0.05$ $r = -0.61$, $p < 0.05$ $r=-0.61$, $p<0.05$). Kumar et al. (2021) further highlighted those bureaucratic inefficiencies and poor coordination at this level hinder ICDS programs, leaving AWWs without necessary guidance and resources.

A full **100 percent of respondents agreed** strongly with this statement, which pointed towards systemic gaps in ICDS's grievance mechanisms. Chi-square results, $\chi^2 = 39.24$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2=39.24$, $p<0.001$ $\chi^2=39.24$, $p<0.001$ showed an appreciable relationship between dysfunctional grievances

mechanism and low morale workers showing a negative correlation with an r value of -0.70 , $p < 0.01$. The ineffective grievance mechanisms thus create distrust and demotivation, isolating worker and degrading the employee performance, as said in a study by Patel, in 2020.

Administrative inefficiencies also emerged as a critical barrier, with **34.3 percent strongly agreeing** and **36.5 percent agreeing** that they hinder the delivery of services. On the other hand, **17.3 percent disagreed** and **9.2 percent strongly disagreed**, signifying regional disparities. Chi-square results ($\chi^2=25.36$, $p<0.05$ \\ $\chi^2 = 25.36$, $p < 0.05$) indicated that there was a significant relationship between administrative inefficiencies and the disparities in service delivery. A moderate negative correlation ($r=-0.58$, $p<0.05$ \\ $r = -0.58$, $p < 0.05$) suggested that inefficiencies decreased attention to core responsibilities such as community outreach. Sharma et al. (2019) revealed that inconsistent administration results in service delivery inequity, which causes dissatisfaction among frontline workers.

It was evident that 88.6 percent strongly agreed and **11.4 percent agreed** with the fact that working with the Health Department is tough. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=31.76$, $p<0.001$ \\ $\chi^2 = 31.76$, $p<0.001$) showed poor collaboration to be significantly correlated with delays in service delivery at a moderate negative level of correlation ($r=-0.63$, $p<0.01$ \\ $r = -0.63$, $p < 0.01$). Sharma and Verma (2018) also found the same inefficiencies, as AWWs were left with no option but to improvise in accessing health resources, which added to their stress.

82.2 percent strongly agreed and **17.8 percent agreed** that coordination with the Education Department is difficult. Chi-square results ($\chi^2=28.94$, $p<0.01$ \\ $\chi^2 = 28.94$, $p <$

0.01 $\chi^2=28.94$, $p<0.01$) revealed that poor collaboration disrupts early childhood education services. A high negative correlation ($r=-0.68$, $p<0.01$, $r = -0.68$, $p < 0.01$, $r=-0.68$, $p<0.01$) revealed that lack of communication and teaching materials had hindered the AWWs from conducting educational activities efficiently. Rani et al. (2020) reported that decentralized systems have problems with communication, leading to mixed instructions and shortages of resources.

The findings also revealed that **21.9 percent strongly agreed** and **25.1 percent agreed** that the ICDS scheme is poorly implemented at the sector level. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=27.68$, $p<0.01$, $\chi^2 = 27.68$, $p < 0.01$, $\chi^2=27.68$, $p<0.01$) resulted in a significant dissatisfaction rate with sector-level management: moderate negative correlation $r=-0.58$, and $p<0.05$, $r = -0.58$, $p < 0.05$, $r=-0.58$, $p<0.05$ shows how poor execution affects the moral of the workers and overall quality of service. The author, Desai (2019), identified fragmentary management, poor communication as well as lack of responsibility as some of the common barriers to proper implementation.

At the district level, **21.4 percent strongly agreed** and **26.5 percent agreed** that ICDS implementation is inefficient. Chi-square results $\chi^2=30.45$, $p<0.001$, $\chi^2 = 30.45$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2=30.45$, $p<0.001$ showed a strong association between district-level inefficiencies and delays in service delivery. There was a strong negative correlation $r=-0.68$, $p<0.01$, $r = -0.68$, $p < 0.01$, $r=-0.68$, $p<0.01$ showing that poor coordination and accountability significantly hampers the program outcomes. Sharma and Soni (2018) raised similar concerns; misaligned priorities and bureaucratic dysfunctions have impeded the achievement of success in the program.

The study found that **26.2 percent strongly agreed** and **21.1 percent agreed** with the statement, "I am not applauded for my good work." Chi-square results were obtained as $\chi^2=29.12$, $p<0.01$. Thus, it can be stated that there is a significant association between lack of recognition and reduced morale; this correlation is moderate and negative, $r=-0.61$, $p<0.05$. Sharma and Soni (2018) emphasized that recognition and appreciation are crucial motivators, and their absence leads to burnout and reduced productivity, particularly for AWWs in challenging rural environments.

26.5 percent strongly agreed and **14.1 percent agreed** that they experience unnecessary administrative interference, while **21.9 percent disagreed** and **28.6 percent strongly disagreed**, reflecting varying perceptions. Chi-square results ($\chi^2=34.76$, $p<0.001$) revealed a significant positive relationship between administrative interference and inefficiencies in service delivery. A strong negative correlation ($r=-0.68$, $p<0.01$) proved that excessive bureaucracy reduces a worker's capacity to attend to core responsibilities such as nutrition monitoring. Singh et al. (2020) noted that administrative overload diverts attention from essential tasks, while Patel (2017) emphasized that autonomy enhances frontline performance.

Community and Subordinate Support-

The study revealed that **67.0 percent of the respondents strongly agreed** and **11.4 percent agreed** that they received little or no support from the community. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=31.12$, $p<0.001$) showed a significant association between the lack of community support and inefficiency in ICDS service delivery. This depicts a strong negative correlation in the direction of $r = -0.70$, $p < 0.01$, meaning that lousy community support prevents an AWW from successfully

providing activities like nutrition, immunization, and early childhood education. Desai and Raval (2017) state that the total absence of community engagement considerably restricts the effectiveness of community-based programs such as ICDS.

The study also showed that **60.0 percent of the respondents strongly agreed** and **15.7 percent agreed** that they received less support from subordinates such as Anganwadi Helpers. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=28.45$, $p<0.01$) $\chi^2 = 28.45$, $p < 0.01$ showed a statistically significant relationship between subordinate support and operational efficiency. A negative correlation was there where AWWs feel overburdened due to a lack of assistance by helpers and get themselves ineffective ($r = -0.62$, $p < 0.05$). Sharma and Pathak (2019) noted that Anganwadi Helper has the prominent part of cooking, making notebooks and social interaction. Helpers being demotivated or even disengaged lead to AWWs having to take on more responsibilities that shift their focus away from core activities such as child nutrition monitoring and early childhood education, thus compromising service quality.

Moreover, **32.2 percent of the respondents strongly agreed** and **38.1 percent agreed** that Gram Panchayats fail to give proper support. Chi-square analysis ($\chi^2=30.87$, $p<0.01$) $\chi^2 = 30.87$, $p < 0.01$ clearly indicated the presence of strong association of Gram Panchayat involvement with resource availability. The correlation is highly positive at $r=0.65$, $p<0.01$ $r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$, suggesting that the institutional support contributes to a higher efficiency in ICDS. Sharma and Pathak (2019) noted that Gram Panchayats play a vital role in allocating resources, mobilizing their communities, and providing much logistical support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Identification and Incentives of AWWs: Regular scheme for identification and incentives are to be made to elevate the morale and satisfaction of working with job at the Anganwadi level.
2. Curbing the Administrative Overreach: Administration processes be made less cumbersome and adequate powers should be given to the Anganwadi Workers to bring efficiency at their work place.
3. Enhancement of Infrastructure and Resources: Timely distribution of infrastructure and other resources for efficient delivery of service.
4. Time Pay Salary: Salary payments in time with support for operational cost so that stress does not rise and performance increases.
5. Training and Capacity Building: There are training programs continuously being implemented in the area of digital literacy and skill building as well for better service delivery.
6. Interdepartmental Coordination Facilitation: Coordination between ICDS, Health, and Education Departments for Anganwadi Worker's conducive environment.
7. Strengthening Community Support: The effectiveness of ICDS programs can be strengthened by strengthening community support and local participation.
8. Policy Reforms: These reforms should be implemented in totality to enhance the management of ICDS and improve support for Anganwadi workers.

CONCLUSION

The study "Breaking Barriers: Examining the Effects of Dysfunctional ICDS Management on Anganwadi Workers' Efficiency in Gujarat" elaborates upon the problems that the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme imposes on the efficiency of the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs). In this research, it was found that despite the indisposition of AWWs to implement grassroot health, nutrition, and education services, the inefficiency in their management was severely hampered by systemic issues. The main issues identified are delay in payment, lack of infrastructure, administrative inefficiency, and non-cooperation from higher authority and the local people. Overloaded workload and non-existence of computer knowledge add to the inefficiency of service delivery. A study also reflects a need for interdepartmental coordination and lack of appreciation from the higher authorities toward the role of AWWs which demotivates and decreases the effectiveness of the entire program. Urgent structural reforms in the management of ICDS are thus highlighted through the research, with emphasis on training, infrastructure, timely support in terms of finance, and community engagement. Tackling these issues may enhance the efficiency of AWWs and, by extension, improve the implementation of ICDS. This study identifies critical areas for interventions and contributes to the ongoing discourse regarding improvement of public health and welfare systems in Gujarat along with highlighting the indispensable roles of Anganwadi Workers in building an integrated and sustainable development framework in Gujarat.

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Perspectives in Social Work

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

Criteria for acceptance of articles

The Journal welcomes articles, reports of research studies, field experiences and academic papers related to Social Work, Social Change, Social Research, Social Psychology, Social Policy and current topics having a bearing on Social Work Theory and Practice. Manuscripts are selected on the basis of relevance to Social Work education and practice, sound treatment of subject, clarity in presentation, methodology of research articles, implications for intervention, appropriateness of references, correct language and evidence of a high level of scholarship.

The author should send soft copies of the article to **nnperspective@cswnn.edu.in**. If the manuscript is found feasible for review, a plagiarism report will be asked from the author. In case the author is not able to do the plagiarism report, they can request the journal secretary to run the plagiarism report by paying the sum of rupees 300/-. There is no guarantee that your paper will be accepted for publication after the plagiarism report. Only after peer review feedback, editorial decision is made.

Declaration

Each article should be accompanied with a declaration by the authors stating that the article is original and has not been earlier published nor been submitted for publication elsewhere. If the article has already been published, then permission from the publishers for republishing has to be enclosed along with the manuscript.

Responsibility of Authors: Authors are solely responsible for the factual accuracy of their contributions. The author is responsible for obtaining permission to quote lengthy excerpts from previously published material.

Structure of the Article

A cover page indicating:

- Title
- Author Name and Organizational Affiliations
- Corresponding Author Contact Details (postal address, telephone, email)
- Word Length (including abstract, keywords and references)

Abstract and Keywords

A second page including:

- **Title of the paper**
- **An abstract of not more than 150 words**
About the abstract - Each article should be summarized in an abstract of **no more than 150 words**. Abstracts must be structured, using four headings: Objective, Method, Results, and Conclusions. Format the abstract as a single paragraph in *Italics*. Abbreviations and citations NOT to be included in the abstract unless the study replicates or builds directly on another's work.
- **Keywords upto five keywords.**

Length and presentation

- The length of the article may range between 3000 and 5000 words, including the abstract, keywords and references but NOT including references, figures, or tables.
- All parts of the manuscript should be typewritten in MS Word typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with margins of at least one inch on all sides. The pages should be numbered serially.
- Within the text of the article, no features should be included that enable the authorship to be identified (for example in page headers and footers or acknowledgements).

Citations, notes, and references

- All evidence based statements within the article **MUST** be supported with proper citations.

-
- Authors should ensure that ALL in-text citations have a corresponding reference entry and that each reference entry is cited in the text. Articles with citations but without reference list or vice-versa will NOT be accepted.
 - Key statements in the article may be supported by the author with a logical explanation, the author's opinion, illustration, or in-text citation/paraphrasing of another author's work.
 - Non-citation of others' written work amounts to plagiarism and, thereby, fraud. If plagiarism is identified, the article will not be accepted for publication.
 - Only the last name of the author and the year of publication must be cited in the text.
 - Notes, when necessary should be numbered continuously and should be printed as end notes. Use of footnotes should be avoided.
 - References of both printed and electronic sources should be included at the end of the article in APA format.

References should be listed in *alphabetical order* as follows:
Barai-Jaitly, T. (2002). The health status of children in India: An overview. Seen but not heard: India's marginalised, neglected and vulnerable children, 43-63 New Delhi: VHA

Dhagamwar, V. (2006) Child Rights to Elementary Education: National and International Provisions in Ravi Kumar (ED), The Crisis of Elementary Education in India (pp. 57 – 91). New Delhi: Sage

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Tables and Figures

- Tables, figures, graphs and diagrams (illustrations) should not be embedded in the text. Place tables and figures after the References section and indicate preferred placement point in the body of the manuscript such as "<Insert Table 1 here>".
- A short descriptive title should appear above each table with a clear legend and any footnotes suitably identified below. All units must be included.
- Figures and diagrams should be completely labelled, taking into account necessary size reduction and should be supplied in .gif, .jpg, or .png format with resolution 300 dpi or higher.
- Ensure any colors used in figures will be distinct when converted to black and white for print version.
- The word percent should replace the symbol '%' when it is used in the text, but the symbol '%' can be used in parentheses.

Review System

The review of the manuscript will be blind and impartial. Manuscripts are reviewed by the Editorial Board and peer-reviewers. Accepted manuscripts may be revised for clarity, organization and length. The article will be sent to authors via e-mail for correction and should be returned **within seven days** of receipt. Corrections and editing as suggested by the Editorial Board and peer-reviewers should be undertaken by the author and is not the responsibility of the publisher. The decision of the Editorial Board will be final and binding.

Publication of articles

The accepted articles are scheduled for publication in the chronological order in which they are received. The publication lag of an accepted article is generally one year. Each author gets a complimentary copy of the journal issue in which his/her article is printed.

Communication

Communication with reference to articles should be addressed to:

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GUIDELINES FOR BOOK REVIEWERS

Pre-requisites for a Book Review

The book under review should have been published in the **last two years** and should have direct relevance to the field of social work.

Expectations of a Book Review

The book review can include the following aspects.

- Title of the book (underlined/italicized), edition, name(s) of the author(s)/editor(s), year of publication and name of publisher (separated by a colon), ISBN number, Format (hardcover/soft cover), number of pages and price of the book.
- Objective/theme of the book
- Contents/organization of the book
- Intended audience for the book
- Perceived response of the audience/user (would you recommend it to the user)
- Approach of the book (topical/analytical/chronological /descriptive/biographical)
- Concise summary of contents
- A critique of the content of the book (language and presentation)
- Remarks on the strengths and limitations of the book, originality, implications for practice, contribution to knowledge, contemporary relevance, applicability to Indian conditions in case of a foreign book, adherence to ethical practices in referencing information)
- Conclusion

A book review could also include:

- A catchy quip/anecdote that succinctly delivers the reviewer's perspective/viewpoint/argument
- Relevant information of the author, where he/she stands in the genre/field of enquiry
- A note (where appropriate) on how well the text is supported by tables/ diagrams illustration
- Quote with a specific page reference. Excessive quotations to be avoided.

Points to note when the book is an edited version comprising chapters from many authors:

- Summary of each chapter or section (in keeping with the abovementioned guidelines)
- Way in which the central theme is dealt with in each chapter or section
- Name of the author and related information

Editing Procedure

The Editorial Board reserves the right to modify the Book Review for length, clarity and content. The reviewer's concurrence to this is assumed, unless specified otherwise by the reviewer.

Typescript for a Book Review

The book review should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with margins of at least one inch on all sides on A4 paper and **SHOULD NOT exceed 1500 words**.

Publication of Book Reviews

The Book reviews are scheduled by the Editorial Team of Perspectives as per the quality of the review and contemporary issues. Priority will be given to invited book reviews. Every book reviewer gets a complimentary copy of the journal issue in which their review gets published.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARTICLES

I. Writing an Article based on a Research Paper/Reports.

This is an article based on an original research project/study, involving information from primary data sources. Such an article contains the following sections:

- Introduction
 - Description of the subject
 - Critical Summary of available information
 - Background of the research
 - Problem identification / analysis
 - Research questions
 - Rationale for the study
- Methodology
 - Aims of the research
 - Research design
 - Variables
 - Operational definitions
 - Sampling strategy
 - Description of the tools of the data collection
 - Techniques for analysis
 - Limitations of the study, if any
- Discussion:
 - Results of the study: This should include a summarized description of the statistical figures and techniques as well as a concise note on the key findings which could be descriptive or numeric
 - Interpretation of the data in terms of:
 - Validation of the hypothesis
 - Corroboration with cited literature

• Conclusion and recommendations:

This section should include the following

- Recommendations to improve/remedy the situation
- Implication for the future research and field practice

II. Writing an Academic Article

This article is based on information from secondary data sources. It generally seeks to raise new issues or examine existing issues from a new perspective. It can also be used for theory building. It should contain the following sections:

- Introduction:
 - Description of the background and importance of the subject under consideration

- Statement of purpose
- Rationale for the article
- Discussion:
 - Critical review of literature

- Gaps in knowledge/services and emerging area addressed:
 - Intervention methods
- Conclusion:
 - Summary of key points
 - Recommendations

III. Writing an Article based on Field Experiences

This article stems from the experiences of the author. It focuses on a specific issue / problem / project / program that is within the purview of the author's professional practice and is descriptive in nature. It provides details of how the author dealt with the specific issue / problem or implemented the program / project under consideration. An overview of such an article is given below.

- Introduction:
 - Description of the subject under consideration
 - Critical review of relevant literature
 - Problem identification/analysis
 - Rationale for intervention
- Discussion:
 - Details of the problem/issue/program/project under consideration
 - Action plan to improve/remedy the situation
 - Details of implementation of the action plan
 - Critical assessment of effectiveness of intervention
 - Learning in relation to existing theory
 - Limitations and suggested modifications
- Conclusion:
 - Summary of key points
 - Suggestions for future work

Submissions that do not conform to the above guidelines will be returned for modifications before entering the review process.



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