



**NEWSLETTER-7**

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### **Editorial Communication**

Dear comrades, friends and well-wishers,

‘We have no other way but to start another struggle for Independence’, these prophetic words were uttered by Manikonda Suryavati, a leader of the women’s movement and one of the major founders of All India Democratic Women’s Association in Andhra Pradesh in the last public meeting attended by her in 1993. Like Kanak Mukhopadhyay from Bengal, Manikonda Suryavati was born in 1921 and our organisation will be paying tributes to their exalted memory this year on the occasion of their common birth centenary. In doing so, we shall have to recall again and again that what they shared in common together with many of the founders of our organisation was their early induction into left politics and their vision of an independent India where all the people, including women, would enjoy social justice and equality.

What Manikonda Suryavati had perceived in 1993, even at the outset of the neo-liberal regime in India, has become starkly evident to our movement today. She had spoken of policies ‘increasing the gap between the rich and the poor’, of the nation being ‘pawned’ to foreigners again and of the fruits of ‘our hard-earned Independence’ being on the verge of disappearance. For veterans like Suryavati, Independence meant not only political independence from colonial rulers, but also freedom from child marriage and from caste prejudices, right to widow remarriage, right to education, and the rights of farmers, men and women, to the land they enriched with their labour. Her words of warning suggest that she could see that when these social and economic rights of the people were jeopardised, the sovereignty of the nation would be in danger again.

Have we not experienced in the last few decades how the neo-liberal model of development, far from transporting us to twenty-first century hyper-modernity has increased manifold hunger, lack of employment, humiliation, and worst kinds of violence against women? Have we not seen how corporate greed intent on squeezing natural and human resources to the utmost finds its best allies in the most authoritarian, most anti-democratic, most retrogressive forces in the country which seek to replace the Constitution by Manusmriti? As our cherished organisation moves towards its 40th anniversary on 12 March this year, do we not have the responsibility to emulate the example of our founder-leaders by rising to be equal to the enormous challenge that faces our women today? Let us resolve that we have to win this second freedom struggle!

**Malini Bhattacharya, President, All India Democratic Women's Association**

**One Step Ahead in the struggle against Sexual Harassment at  
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## **One Step Ahead In the Struggle Against Sexual Harassment At The Workplace**

-Mariam Dhawale, General Secretary, AIDWA

Priya Ramani's recent acquittal in the criminal defamation case is a landmark in the struggle for women's rights. Ramani had alleged sexual harassment by M J Akbar, at that time the editor of a newspaper, during her job interview two decades ago. When she made this allegation, Akbar was a minister in the BJP government at the Centre. Charges of sexual harassment against Akbar were made by 20 other women journalists too. Akbar sued Ramani for criminal defamation and for tarnishing his 'stellar reputation'. This was the case in which Ramani has been acquitted.



*Priya Ramani with her lawyer senior advocate Rebecca John.*

M J Akbar had engaged the best lawyers in the country to fight his case. However, Priya Ramani's lawyer Rebecca John, fought the case admirably.

The order of the Court upheld the "right of a woman to a violence-free, safe workplace". It also pointed out that "a woman cannot be punished for raising her voice against sexual abuse on the pretext of criminal complaint of defamation, as the right of reputation cannot be protected at the cost of the right to life and dignity as guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution".

Sexual harassment at the workplace is a violation of a woman's right to equality, liberty and life with dignity. It creates an insecure, intimidating and hostile work environment for women. This discourages women from seeking opportunities to improve their economic and social position. Incidents of sexual harassment were earlier not considered as 'serious crimes' and were trivialised. 'Why raise such a hue and cry if he just touched or winked or made lewd remarks' – is the usual refrain of the patriarchal world.

In 1992, Bhanwari Devi working in the *Sathin* project in Rajasthan was brutally gang raped because she had tried to stop a child marriage. Bhanwari Devi lodged a case against the offenders and fought for justice. However, the accused were acquitted by a trial court. Bhanwari Devi's determination to continue her struggle and the shocking acquittals inspired several women's groups and NGOs to file a petition in the Supreme Court under the collective platform of Vishakha.



*Bhanwari Devi is a grassroots government worker.*

Before the Vishakha judgement of the Supreme Court in 1997, there were no formal guidelines on how an incident involving sexual harassment at the workplace should be dealt with by an employer.

It was on August 13, 1997 that the Supreme Court framed guidelines to be followed at all workplaces or institutions, until legislation against sexual harassment at the workplace was enacted in 2013. The Supreme Court invoked basic principles of human rights enshrined in the Constitution of India under Article 14, 15, 19(1)(g) and 21, and provisions of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which had been ratified in 1993 by the Government of India. The guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court were to be

treated as the law declared under Article 141 of the Constitution. This brought the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace in focus. Yet it took 17 years for the central government to finally enact 'The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013'.

The Act defines sexual harassment as unwelcome acts or behaviour (whether directly or by implication) namely, physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favours, making sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature.

Despite this Act, the road to struggles against sexual harassment has been long and arduous. Women raising their voice against this crime have faced humiliation and tremendous obstacles in their fight for justice. The #MeToo movement brought this issue upfront and it sent a strong message that women shall not keep quiet against this humiliation.

In this background, the Priya Ramani judgement assumes immense importance. It is in a way a vindication of the women's movement's fight for self-respect and equality. The judgement by the Delhi Court upholds a woman's right to a life with dignity. In these most difficult times, when so many innocents are languishing in jail and bail applications are being rejected, this judgement is a silver lining among dark clouds.

Even though complaints lodged against sexual harassment at the workplace are the tip of the iceberg, and women are wary of raising their voices against it due to the social stigma attached, this judgement will encourage women to speak up and to stop enduring such humiliations.

## **Why AIDWA Should Campaign for NCW's Draft National Policy for Women in Agriculture**

-Professor Archana Prasad, CEC, AIDWA

In 2008, the National Commission for Women prepared a Draft National Policy for Women in Agriculture and submitted it to the Ministry of Agriculture in 2009 with a recommendation for its adoption. This policy was the outcome of the evaluation of the Report of the National Commission of Farmers (2008) by the members of the Commission, who felt that points raised by its members had not been incorporated fully by the Commission. Therefore a sub-committee was set up with present AIDWA President Malini Bhattacharya, who was then a member of the Commission, as its Chairperson. The sub-committee comprised of her and seven other members, namely Vandana Shiva, Kanchan Chopra, Archana Prasad, Shakti Kak, Smita Gupta, Hema Pande and Kusum Mishra, the deputy secretary to the Commission. Jayati Gupta, another valuable member of the sub-committee breathed her last before the report could be completed. As can be seen from the composition of this committee, some AIDWA members together with other prominent scholars and activists were active participants in the formation of the Policy document. In the light of its relevance today, it may be used effectively in our campaign for rights of women in rural India.



*Women farmers in Haryana. Photo: People's Archive of Rural India*

The importance of the Draft Policy which was submitted by the Commission in 2009, but never adopted by the Ministry, has to be seen in the context of the historic farmers' protests today which have seen a large mobilisation of women. Our units have already been active throughout the country raising demands for women in agriculture.

1. Right to be recognised as a farmer and worker
2. Right to land and natural resources
3. Right to food and food security
4. Right to livelihood, decent work and freedom from debt
5. Right to regulated markets and fair prices

Some of these demands have been the result of our continued discussions on the impact of agrarian distress on women and their families through commission papers that have recorded the experiences of different struggles by AIDWA units and culminated in some huge mobilisations. The role of AIDWA in the current struggle is a pointer to its long standing commitment to women's rights in agriculture. We need to link the Draft National Policy on Women in Agriculture with this ongoing campaign and assess how its implementation can help in achieving our objectives.

### **1. Right to be Recognised as a Farmer and Worker**

The first section of the Draft Policy explicitly recognises women as farmers when it states that: "The term women farmers and agriculture workers includes all paid and unpaid work in agriculture and its allied sectors such as animal husbandry, forestry, fisheries, agro-processing, mining and quarrying and other related activities. It refers to all women working in on farm and non-farm activities".

As per this definition, the Policy, if adopted would include a majority of the women workers in rural regions. Today there are about 77 million women in paid work in agriculture and another 10-20 million women in paid work in fisheries and dairy farming. In addition there are about 432 million women in unpaid work in the agricultural sector. About 72 million women have lost their paid jobs in agriculture and allied sectors. Therefore, if the provisions of this policy are adopted, they will apply to almost 500 million women who are central to survival of the rural economy.

### **2. Right to Land and Natural Resources**

The struggle for joint pattas and rights of women in property has been waged by different units of AIDWA since a long time. After considerable struggle, the 'joint patta' was recognised in the Forest Rights Act, though not implemented properly. Further, the Draft Policy recognises the importance of women's right to land and natural resources. It explicitly recommends that customary laws and community practices should be reformed to ensure that women get rights to land on homestead and farms. It also recognises the need to evaluate the impact of displacement and land acquisition etc., for big projects or public works from the point of view of women's needs, making special recommendations for recognising women's knowledge on biodiversity and seeds and strongly advocating

implementation of the Forest Rights Act. These recommendations are particularly important from the point of view of our campaign, because we have been highlighting that it is important for women to control their own natural resources (including access to water sources etc.) if they are to break the chain of oppression inside and outside the family. Further, since less than 20 per cent of the land holdings are managed or owned by women, they are not considered to be farmers. Hence, the land question is of utmost importance for rural women.

### **3. Right to Food and Food Security**

The growing threats to food security have been highlighted by AIDWA in many campaigns; the pandemic has only exposed the weaknesses of the successive governments' targeting of the PDS system. We have been advocating for the need for a universal public distribution system and the expansion of state support for procurement of cheap food grains in order to combat growing hunger. The Draft Policy suggests explicit provisions for increasing the production of food grains through land use planning, thus providing a basis for limiting export oriented agriculture. It also states that the Food Corporation of India should procure the bulk of the food grains on minimum support prices so that women have access to cheap and adequate food. The policy explicitly supports integrated food systems and inclusion of coarse grains, cereals, pulses, oilseeds and other essential produce.

### **4. Right to Livelihood Security, Decent Work and Freedom from Debt**

The problem of recognition of women as 'farmers' and 'workers' is one that AIDWA has been raising for many years now. A majority of the women are employed in the agricultural and allied sectors. But a large proportion of their work is unpaid and invisible. The Draft Policy states that the agricultural census and other databases should recognise and estimate the amount of unpaid labour put in by women. It also states that all women workers, including migrant and seasonal workers, should be registered as 'workers' and provided social security benefits like provident fund, pension, maternity entitlements etc. Further, the document also recommends decent working conditions with toilets, creches, drinking water, transport and other basic amenities in workplaces. In this sense, the policy reflects our long-standing demands and the struggle for its adoption can be easily linked to our on-going campaigns. In addition, the policy urges the government to set up common facility centres so that women can make use of technology and other facilities like grading, processing etc., in order to get a better price for their produce.

The Government of India's schemes and policies such as the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Yojana or the MUDRA scheme etc., places women at the mercy of micro-finance companies and non-banking finance companies leading many women into the trap of indebtedness. The Draft policy notes that the success of any SHG based livelihood strategy is only possible if women farmers are provided

budgetary support and protected markets for such livelihood strategies, as done by the Government of Kerala under the Kudumbashree Mission. The policy provides for debt relief measures and budgetary allocations for low interest credit for inputs.

## **5. Right to Regulated Markets and Fair Prices**

We know that more than 1 million women are in the business of selling vegetables, whereas about 40 per cent of fish retailers are women. The Draft policy provides measures to secure and protect their livelihoods in the wake of the growing influence of multi-brand corporate retailers on these markets. For example, the Policy states that the government should provide budgetary support to prioritise women-run PDS shops as well as for financial credit and tax incentives to women retailers and adopt measures to protect small retailers. There should be mahila haats and mandis so that women can make direct sales.

*This is just a brief overview of the Draft Policy illustrating how it can help our campaign for the rights of rural women. It provides us an opportunity to present an alternative policy discourse for our campaign. Hence, AIDWA must have wide consultations on the Draft Policy and demand that it must be adopted.*

[We have given below the recommendations of the Draft National Policy for Women in Agriculture extracted from the document which may be found on the NCW Website.]

### **POLICY DIRECTION RECOMMENDED BY THE DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY FOR WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE (NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN, 2009)**

#### **I. Natural Resource Assets**

##### **A) Land Rights**

1. In all legal measures on land rights, especially land reforms, there shall be special focus on the rights of women and single women headed households including widows, abandoned and deserted women. This shall apply in cases of both agricultural and homestead property.
2. All efforts shall be made to remove gender discriminatory provisions from all personal laws, both with regard to homestead and agricultural property.

3. Customary laws and community practices, especially with respect to Jhum and traditional agriculture shall be reviewed to ensure that women get rights over homestead and agricultural land.
4. Land titles will be held and recorded as joint pattas in the names of and with the signature and consent of both the spouses. The Land Revenue Act shall be amended to include the provision of joint pattas.
5. All land records shall be updated immediately after distribution of joint pattas and women shall be provided access to information about joint title to land and family property. Land registration charges for single women, widows, separated, abandoned and deserted women should be minimal.
6. Legal guidelines for independent access and control over joint pattas in case of dissolution of marriage shall be worked out. In case of dissolution of marriage, maintenance shall be worked out to include women's right to joint patta.
7. The process of devolution of jointly held pattas shall be done in a manner which protects the right of daughters to parental property.
8. Transfer and sale of any common agricultural or homestead land, whether owned privately or collectively, shall be done with the prior and explicit consent of both spouses.

#### B) Displacement and Rehabilitation

1. The government shall ensure that no agricultural land has been diverted for non- agricultural purpose, industrial or developmental project unless it has been demonstrated that such a project will serve a "public purpose" or is in the public interest. In any case of diversion, the least displacing option shall be adopted with a view to minimizing all displacement and with prior consent of women likely to be affected.
2. All land acquisition for development and commercial activities shall be undertaken in accordance with land use plans prepared by state governments. Women shall be given adequate representation and hearing in the preparation of these plans and their needs and interests shall be taken into consideration.
3. All processes of land acquisition for developmental or commercial projects shall require the explicit prior consent of women who are likely to be affected by specific projects.
4. Gender concerns shall be prioritised and taken into account when environmental and social impact assessments are done of any land alienating projects. Women shall have equal right to compensation and rehabilitation in case of the sale or transfer or alienation of privately or collectively held land.

5. Women shall be recognized as “interested parties” and separate entities for any compensation and rehabilitation package. Care shall be taken to see that all widows, single, abandoned and separated women are also registered as separate entities.
6. The government shall ensure that the interest of all non-landed women (like labourers, pastoralists etc) and those women working in the allied sector (like livestock, forestry, fishing etc) and whose livelihood is connected to the land being diverted is protected. In case of common property resources alternative sites and rights to access will be provided to them.
7. The interests of women workers in the allied sectors shall be protected. Women shall be compensated for loss of access to common lands and non-farm livelihoods.
8. Basic social infrastructure shall be provided in all rehabilitation packages. It shall be mandatory for all rehabilitation packages to include the formation of a Mahila welfare fund to which contributions shall be made by both government and project holders.
9. Adequate assistance for rehabilitation and reconstruction shall be given to all women and their families who are victims of natural calamities.

#### C) Seeds and Biodiversity

1. The seed and biodiversity knowledge of women shall be recognized, documented, protected and integrated into agricultural research in the public domain.
2. In situ conservation of seeds and plant varieties shall be encouraged and promoted through women’s self help groups and seed banks.
3. Priority shall be given to women and women’s groups in the locality for participatory seed production and breeding.
4. Efforts shall be made to ensure that the seed and biodiversity knowledge of women remains in the public domain and is supported by a strong intellectual property rights regime that protects their rights and prevents monopolistic trade practices.

#### D) Water

1. The access of women farmers and agricultural workers, irrespective of caste and creed, to all sources of water, whether owned and managed by the state, local community and panchayat institutions, shall be ensured and prioritised for drinking, domestic and other purposes related to their work in agriculture and allied sectors.

2. To facilitate the conservation and equal distribution of all water resources, including ground water, panchayats shall promote the formation of women's groups and SHGs.
3. Women agricultural workers from families of landless and small and marginal households shall have the first right over biomass augmented from watersheds.
4. The allocation of water for non-domestic and non-agricultural activities (including allied activities) in rural areas shall be done with the prior and explicit consent of the local women users.

#### E) Forest Rights

1. The commitment of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2007 to have all forest rights jointly registered in the names of both spouses shall be honoured.
2. All committees constituted under the existing forest laws, policies, rules or guidelines shall have a mandatory minimum women's representation of at least 33 per cent.
3. Special care shall be taken to ensure that forest rights for women from scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, denotified tribes and other women from traditional forest dwelling communities are maintained.
4. Women farmers and agricultural workers shall have the right to access, own and transport minor forest produce and fuelwood.
5. Women residing in or around the forested areas shall have protection against harassment, and sexual exploitation in order to ensure the unhindered exercise of their rights to collect fuelwood and minor forest produce.
6. A portion of the funds recovered under Net Present Value and Compensatory Afforestation (as a result of the diversion of forest lands) shall be used for the welfare of women and children displaced by such activities.
7. Knowledge and conservation practices of women forest users shall be recognized, upgraded and integrated into all programmes and schemes of forest protection and conservation.

## **II. Production System**

### A) Production of Foodgrains

1. Land use planning shall be done to ensure that sufficient land is available for food cultivation. A realistic assessment shall be made on the diversion of land under food production for export oriented crops.

2. Primacy shall be given to the production of food grains by ensuring minimum support price, continuous and affordable supply of inputs, credit at minimum interests and the expansion of procurement, extension and other agricultural services.
3. All efforts shall be made to ensure food security and self reliance by expanding the coverage of the area under food crops. This shall be done by bringing dry lands and uncultivated lands under food production.
4. Women's cooperatives shall be given priority in leasing or sale of uncultivated lands for agro-forestry or integrated and biological farming
5. Technical and financial assistance shall be provided to adequate public investments in protective and micro-irrigation; land and soil conservation practices with a view to augment and increase the production of women farmers. Integrated food production systems shall also be promoted through these initiatives.

#### B) Labour and Livelihood

1. Family labour and the unpaid work of women in all farm and non-farm activities shall be recorded, estimated and quantified in order to ensure that it is recognized and accounted for in Gross Domestic Product. All agricultural census and surveying organisations shall initiate measures to evolve methodologies for identifying, enumerating and estimating such activities in the agriculture and allied sectors. (It is also suggested that since a good portion of such work cannot be completed in terms of exchange value and has only use value. It cannot be seen as part of wage labour. Compensation for such labour has to be made through adequate social benefits rather than through wages. Otherwise, there may be insuperable problems).
2. Basic amenities like toilets, drinking water, crèches, transportation, resting shelters, etc. shall be provided to all women workers in these sectors.
3. All women farmers and workers in the agriculture and allied sectors shall be recognised and registered as workers. They shall be entitled to social security benefits including health care, childcare, insurance and old age pension to which workers in the sectors are entitled.
4. Seasonal and migrant women workers in agriculture and allied sectors shall also be registered so that they can be provided social security benefits and rights like other women workers. Their rights shall be recognized in all policy statements, programmes and schemes.

5. The state shall also take adequate measures to ensure that women workers are given insurance coverage, special care and assistance in case of occupation related illness (exhaustion, stress, etc) and accidents, especially those taking place on the field of the employer.
6. Minimum and equal wages shall be enforced in all farm and non-farm activities in agriculture and allied activities. This shall be monitored by women representatives in panchayats.
7. Women workers who are home-based and piece rate workers shall be ensured a piece rate that gives them a daily wage which is at least equivalent to the minimum wage. A tripartite mechanism shall be set up to ensure that a fair living piece rate is fixed.
8. In the context of the current food crisis primacy shall be given to the production of foodgrains by ensuring minimum support price, continuous and affordable supply of inputs, credit at minimum interests and the expansion of procurement, extension and other agricultural services. Landless women and workers with seasonal employment shall be given priority and provided opportunities for work throughout the year.
9. NREGA shall be reviewed to ensure that women's work in public worksites is recognized and minimum wages are paid to them. Efforts shall be made to ensure that such wages are paid on time. With the consent of women workers, part of the wages may also be paid in foodgrains. Creche services shall also be provided on NREGA work sites.
10. Schemes shall be formed by state and central governments to subsidize and promote the formation of labour cooperatives and collective farming amongst women agricultural workers, especially the landless workers and marginal farmers.
11. The formation of cooperatives, group enterprises and SHG owned enterprises shall be promoted and subsidized in processing of agricultural produce.
12. Women agricultural workers shall be encouraged to undertake collective activities in non-farm sectors such as animal husbandry, forestry, and other activities through promotional schemes and subsidies.

### C) Inputs for Agriculture and Allied Activities

1. Fertilizer and manures: Public subsidies on chemical fertilizers and HYV seeds and pesticides shall be restored and additional support shall be given to women headed households, especially in areas where farmers suicides have occurred. Production of vermi-compost and microbial fertilizers by women farmers and agricultural workers shall be promoted through SHG groups and SGSY schemes.

2. Seeds and Nurseries: Certified seeds shall be provided through the Krishi Vigyan Kendras. Budgetary support shall be provided to SHGs and SGSY groups development of nurseries and preparation of other plantation materials.
3. Bio Pesticides and Integrated Pest Management System: Local units owned and run by women's groups, particularly landless women, shall be set up for production of bio pesticides. Training, infrastructure and working capital for integrated pest management systems shall be provided by the State Governments through different schemes and block development programmes.
4. Water and Electricity Supply for Agriculture and Allied Activities: Regulated and equitable supply of water and electricity shall be given to all women farmers at nominal rates. Single women headed households, small and marginal farmers, and landless women workers from allied sectors shall be provided water and electricity free of cost.
5. No Agency shall be allowed to impose user charges for water and electricity at rates higher than nominal rates set by the Government.

### **III. Agricultural Marketing and Trade**

#### A) Policy Support for Market Protection

1. Quantitative Restrictions and import duties shall be reinstated to ensure that agricultural markets are protected for women in trade and retail of agriculture and allied products.
2. APMC Acts shall be strengthened to ensure that markets for small farmers and women agricultural workers are protected from unfair competition by monopolies and corporations in retail and procurement of produce.
3. Speculation in the trade of food commodities essential to the health and nutrition of women shall be prohibited. This will help women in accessing food markets and essential commodities at affordable prices.

#### B) Procurement of Agricultural Produce

1. The scope and scale of FCI procurement shall be increased in order to ensure food security and self reliance in food. Public investment shall be made to expand the infrastructure of the Food Corporation of India in Central and Eastern India.

2. Though FCI shall be the primary food procuring agency, it shall give priority to women's cooperatives and SHGs (rather than private traders) in all its contracts and sub-contracts for procuring agricultural produce from local mandis and areas where FCI does not have its own depots. All financial and infrastructural support shall be provided to these groups.
3. All- women mandis shall be set up in localities so that women primary producers can directly market their produce in urban and rural areas.
4. Coarse grains, cereals, pulses, oilseeds and other essential produce necessary for the sustenance, health and nutrition of women and children shall be brought under the procurement system. A minimum support price shall be administered for them.
5. A market price stabilization fund shall be created to counter the fluctuations of the open market. Budgetary support shall be provided for this purpose.

#### C) Procurement of Produce of Allied Sector

1. A Price Commission shall be set up to determine and administer minimum support prices for fodder, non timber forest produce, fish, poultry and livestock products.
2. Women's cooperatives and SHGs shall be formed and promoted to carry out procurement and trade in these products. They shall be linked to LAMPS and TRIFED in the forestry sector, and for dairy products with organizations like NDDB. Adequate credit and budgetary support shall be provided for this.

#### D) Retail Marketing and Trade

1. Policy and legislative support shall be provided to protect women vegetable and food grain retailers from unfair competition by emerging monopolies.
2. A universal public distribution system shall be set up to ensure that all families have an access to foodgrains at affordable rates. This shall be the first step to combat the grave threat to food security being faced by all rural and urban poor.
3. Markets shall be protected and food scarcity prevented by taking adequate steps against hoarding and monopolistic practices. Future trading shall be prohibited in all essential items and agricultural produce.

4. A network of women managed fair price shops shall be established to combat hunger and expand the scope and coverage of public distribution system to all hamlets and villages. The government shall provide budgetary support for this. Preference shall be given to these shops over any other private traders in distribution of PDS rations.
5. Women kisan haats shall be set up for direct marketing and retail by women producers.
6. Financial and tax incentives shall be provided to women retailers so that they can compete better in the market.
7. The market for semi-processed and processed agricultural produce and artisan products shall be supported by strengthening its linkages with the stores managed by KVIC and small scale industries cooperation.
8. Women retailers will be provided training in accounting and measuring practices through literacy and continuing education programmes.
9. The skills of women retailers shall be augmented through technical and credit support in all post harvest and processing operations. Women retailers shall be provided regular market information through field level schools and IT kiosks, and training in accounting, grading, packaging and other related activities.
10. Technical assistance shall be given to upgrade the practices of women retailers so that they can provide value added products at reasonable prices.

#### **IV. Agricultural Organisation, Science and Technology**

##### A) Debt Relief, Rural Credit and Investment

1. Debt Relief Commissions shall be formed at the state level in order to help indebted families facing agricultural distress especially in areas where there are repeated farmer suicides.
2. Women headed households, where women have been abandoned, deserted or rendered homeless because of suicides, loss of employment, atrocities and any other reason shall be given special assistance to become debt free.
3. State governments shall take steps to regulate and give special subsidies to ease the debt of women farmers who have taken loans from money lenders and micro finance institutions in the informal sector.
4. All institutions and individuals providing credit to rural households shall be registered at the block level. They shall have to provide credit at an interest rate that is comparable with and not higher than that of rural public sector banks.

5. All women farmers and workers in the allied sectors shall be provided rural credit for productive activities at an interest rate of 4 per cent irrespective of the size of their landholding.
6. Easy loans and subsidies shall be provided to aid the subsistence of women farmers and agricultural workers in case of crop failure or natural disasters.
7. Access of women to rural credit shall be facilitated through simple documentation procedures where proof of residence should suffice to get a loan. Verification of proof of residence may given by the gram sevak or sarpanch shall be considered as proof or residence in case of application for loans.
8. Diversified credit portfolios shall be developed to include consumption loans for education, health and other basic needs. This will be done on the basis of an integrated approach for overall credit requirements of the family.
9. SHGs who are willing to invest in agricultural marketing, post harvest operations and cooperative/group enterprises in allied sectors shall be given initial and working capital through soft loans.
10. A Gram Mahila Welfare Fund shall be formed in order to create common health, education and child care facilities at worker sites for women workers in agriculture and allied sectors.
11. Crop insurance schemes at nominal premium rates shall be universally implemented. Small and marginal farmers, and single women headed households shall be provided insurance free of cost if they are unable pay nominal premium.
12. In order to protect farmers from the fluctuations of world market prices in agriculture in allied sectors, a market price stabilization fund shall be created by the Central Government as a part of its planned budgetary fund.

#### B) Agricultural Extension

1. Transparent monitoring systems shall be set up to periodically review the working and impact of the agricultural extension system and government schemes on women farmers and agricultural workers.
2. A cadre of women agricultural extension workers shall be created in order to ensure that women farmers have greater access to technology and knowledge that will reduce their labour time while increasing their productivity.
3. Women's knowledge of agriculture and allied sectors shall be recognized and integrated into the agricultural extension service.

4. Women SHGs shall be linked with the agricultural extension service in order to expand its scale and scope, particularly in areas of seed production, nurseries, application and production of bio fertilizers and pesticides, veterinary services, and post harvest operations.
5. Initiatives shall be taken to promote vocational education amongst rural women so that they can be better integrated into the agricultural extension system.
6. The linkages between agricultural universities and extension services shall be strengthened with particular reference to women's concerns.

### C) Research, Science and Technology

1. A gender audit shall be done for all existing research and development programmes in agriculture and allied sectors. Evaluation of new experiments like biofarms, integrated and organic farming shall be done in order to gauge their impact on women's labour and work.
2. Science and technology organisations shall encourage and promote grass roots innovations and the development of need based technologies which reduce the drudgery of women.
3. Women's knowledge of biodiversity in agriculture and allied sectors shall be recognised, integrated and upgraded in all research and development programmes. This will be done especially with respect to seed selection, storage, vegetable production, production of economic and medicinal plants, livestock rearing, food processing, nutrition, health, hygiene, sanitation and environmental protection.=
4. The skills of women artisans shall be upgraded by undertaking programmes of creative grassroots innovations which blend modern day technologies with local knowledge and practices in production of seeds and agricultural inputs, renewable energy resources, and integrated nutrient and pest management. Research shall also be done in the sustainable management and use of common property resources shall be upgraded through transfer and development of appropriate technologies. Women's groups and cooperatives shall be linked to extension services in order to ensure appropriate technology transfer in areas of renewable energy, drinking water and the development of fuel and fodder.
5. Experimental work shall be done to upgrade traditional agricultural practices like Jhum cultivation. Cropping patterns and agricultural technology shall be adapted to meet the needs of women.

6. Agricultural tools and equipment shall be designed to reduce drudgery and meet the requirements of easy use by women. Common facilities and centres will be created to ensure that women have access to these technologies.
7. Women's right over their knowledge of resources and use practices shall be protected and ensured through suitable legislation. All existing acts and policies will be reviewed and modified for this purpose.

## Status of Women in the Manusmṛti

-Namrata Narula, Ph.D. Student at Cambridge University



The *Manusmṛti* is perhaps one of the most notorious and widely read Indian texts. There are two primary factors that are usually credited for its pre-eminence as a text of contemporary Hinduism. Firstly, the *Manusmṛiti* and the *Bhagavad-gītā* were among the earliest texts to be translated by British administrators from Sanskrit to English, and the *Manusmṛti* in particular was used by the British as a compendium of law to adjudicate legal disputes between Hindus. The translator, N.B. Halhed presented the East India Company as the restorer of the moral system of the Vedas, and as the deliverer of the 'Hindoos' from the 'tyrannical' Muslim rulers of India (Rocher, 1993). Through such Orientalist perspectives, Hindus came to be projected as a unified category, and the *Manusmṛti* (amongst a few others) was exalted as an essential canonical text for all Hindus, despite the fact that several strands of Hindu thought until then, such as various devotional (bhakti) and heterodox sects, had not regarded the *dharmaśāstras* as authoritative (Viswanathan, 2003).

Secondly, *dharma* was not developed as a central doctrine in Hindu thought until the rise of Buddhist thought in ancient India. Scholars argue that the sudden privileging of the notion of *dharma* was most likely a reaction to the Mauryan Empire (c. 200 BCE), which posed a challenge to the authority of Brahmins as rightful advisors of the ruling class. The Buddhist king Asoka, for example, is believed to have outlawed animal sacrifice, thus undercutting the very need for a Brahmin class, whose authority came from their sole ability to perform these

sacrificial and purificatory rituals (Olivelle, 2005, p. 38). Moreover, the Mauryas as well as the Nanda dynasty that preceded them are referred to in much Brahminical literature of the time as dynasties of *Śūdras* (lower castes). This supposed usurpation of royal roles by the lower castes, coupled with the suppression of Brahminical entitlements in the areas of ritual and of royal advisorship, culminates in what can be read in these texts as a desperate urgency to restore the political, ritual, and epistemic privileges once afforded to the Brahmin class (Olivelle, 2005, pp. 37–41).

Protecting this authority of the Brahmin caste presupposes a rigid system of mutually exclusive castes; if the various castes were to overlap through miscegenation then it would be impossible to assert the sole authority of one over the other. As such maintaining the 'purity' of the Brahmin caste is of immense importance in ensuring their superiority. Given that one's caste identity is determined by birth into a particular familial lineage, female bodies – seen as the site of reproduction – become incredibly important in reproducing not just the body of the offspring, but also its social identity, that is, the caste identity of its father (Gautam, 2016). The emphasis on monogamous kinship as leading to the excessive control of female bodies has been analysed by Friedrich Engels (1884) as being motivated by the desire of men to pass down an economic inheritance to their children. In this post-Vedic context (and in many parts of contemporary India), caste identity is seen as a type of social inheritance, which equally requires this sort of gendered control. The prospective loss of the pure caste identity of offspring would threaten the authority of *dharmic* law, as it is no longer possible to legislate regarding the socio-religious duties of each caste if caste identities cannot be unequivocally determined.

Thus, the need to maintain control over women's bodies is directly referenced in the *Manusmṛti*, and its influence on contemporaneous narratives such as the *Mahābhārata* is clear in that in many places these texts employ much the same language to speak about women as the *Manusmṛti*. Most notoriously, Manu states that women must never be independent, "As a child, she must remain under her father's control; as a young woman, under her husband's; and when her husband is dead, under her sons" (MS 5.148–49). Another example of the *Manusmṛti*'s *dharmic* discourse on the need to control women can be seen in the following passage from this influential text: "[Women] pay no attention to beauty, they pay no heed to age; whether he is handsome or ugly, they make love to him with the single thought, "He's a man!" Lechery, fickleness of mind, and hard heartedness are innate in them; even when they are carefully guarded in this world, therefore they become hostile towards their husbands. Recognizing thus the nature produced in them at creation by Prajapati, a man should make the utmost effort at guarding them." (MS 9.14–16)

Thus, women must be guarded against their inherently promiscuous nature which could otherwise topple the prevalent social order. Scholars have pointed out that the same *Manusmṛiti* that derides and abuses women for their lack of sexual control and devious nature (as in the above passage), appears to eulogise them when speaking of their role as mothers, or in the context of the family (Olivelle, 2005, p. 35). For example, Manu declares, "[w]here women are revered, there the gods rejoice... Where female relatives grieve, that family soon comes to ruin" (MS 3.56–58). However even seemingly positive notions such as those of 'reverence' and 'protection' (*rakṣā*) can be problematized, implying as it does in this case the cloistering and guarding of women. Indeed, the Sanskrit noun *rakṣaṇa*, often translated as 'protection' can equally be translated as 'custody'. This then is a clear example of the way in which seemingly positive ideals of protection, reverence and domesticity can come to have multiple interpretations, especially vis-a-vis the social freedoms/liberties that are not allowed to women. As such what could be cited as evidence which contradicts the prevailing image of Manu's sexism, does not strike me as contradictory but rather as complementary to his larger discourse on which social roles women may appropriately fulfil.

Another interesting aspect of Manu's discourse on kinship is that his fervent criticism of sexual relationships between women of a higher caste and men of a lower caste is complicated by a strangely permissive attitude towards relationships between upper caste men and lower caste women. As such, while sexual relations between a *Sudra* man and Brahmin woman are seen as threatening social harmony, the sexual union of a Brahmin man with a *Sudra* woman is tolerated (Aktor, 2018). Here then we see that many of Manu's dictats regarding the guarding of women do not apply, in his mind, to lower caste women. Just as a Brahmin is entitled to take any object from the house of the *Sudra* (MS 11.11), he is also sexually entitled to that *Sudra's* wife.

Here then we see the myriad ways in which caste and gender intersect to create multiple axes of oppression. Woman is configured as just another material object that belongs to her husband, but a lower caste woman is configured as a material object that is owned not only by her husband, but also by men and women of the upper castes. The problem of sexism in ancient India, and indeed in contemporary India, cannot therefore be understood as a fight between men and women. Upper caste women too must hold themselves accountable for the myriad and gendered ways in which they have treated lower caste women, and it is impossible to understand gendered oppression in an Indian context without coextensively engaging in an analysis of caste.

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