



**3 days Regional E-Conference: Theme and Concept Note**

**Gender during Covid-19: Perspectives from North-East India**

25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

**Indian Association for Women's Studies-North-Eastern Region**

**In Collaboration with**

**All India Union of Forest Working People**

**Cotton University**

**Gauhati University**

**Manipur University**

**Nagaland Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Trust**

**Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati**

**Tripura University**

**Assam Mahila Samata Society**

**Dibrugarh University**

**K. K. Handique State Open  
University**

**Mizoram University**

**North-East Network**

**Tezpur University**

**Sikkim Government College**

*“This Pandemic is a health crisis. But not just a health crisis. For vast swathes of the globe, the pandemic will leave deep, deep scars. Without support from the international community, we risk a massive reversal of gains made over the last two decades and an entire generation lost, if not in lives then in rights, opportunities and dignity.”*

*-Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator*

As the world grapples with the pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 or Covid-19 and as humanity struggles to come to terms with the enormity of the deaths due to infection, concern around it is no longer the monopoly of medical practitioners, micro-biologists and epidemiologists. The disease has disrupted the existing ways in which we were imagining the world and it provides an opportunity in which we can sculpture the ‘new normal’. The registers on which we exist have determined how we have been affected by the pandemic, and thus while the pandemic has meant ‘work-from-home’ for some, for most it has spelled doom for their lives and livelihood. With advances in the development of a vaccine against the virus having been made, the enormity of the challenge is such that inequalities have sharpened and this requires immediate attention by all sections of the society.

Covid-19 has exposed that those who are already vulnerable due to their class, gender, disability, caste, race, religion and ethnicity are likely to suffer from a ‘double-jeopardy’. Women standing at the intersections of all such ascribed identities are likely to bear the brunt of the global health crisis. While women have been performing unpaid care-work even before the outbreak of the pandemic, the burden of the same has increased drastically with the ‘home’ being the only ‘safe’ place for ‘looking after’ of the elderly and children. Needless to say that this has led to a tremendous increase in the number of hours that women are investing in home labour, in addition to hours that are spent doing office work.

The burden of such work is especially high for single mothers. The pandemic forced governments to announce lockdowns as a way for delaying the spread of the virus. However, it would be naïve to expect that the home which might provide a safe haven against the virus, would be a safe space for those who already exist within violent relationships. In fact, the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka has already referred to the aggravated violence that women are facing at home, during Covid-19 as ‘shadow pandemic’. The burden of increased unpaid care work along with heightened susceptibility towards violence has taken a toll on women’s mental health. This has also been acknowledged in a report by National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore (April 2020).

While the pandemic has over-shadowed all other health concerns, maternity and child health services have suffered to an alarming extent. Though maternal services come under the purview of essential services yet shortages of folic acid and iron tablets, due to infrastructure bottle necks, have increased the vulnerabilities of pregnant women. A serious roll back on the progress achieved in Reproductive, Maternal, newborn, child, adolescent health and nutrition (RMNCAH+N) seems imminent, even while the pandemic has not reached its peak in several parts of the country.

Women's livelihood and savings have also been adversely affected due to the prolonged period of lock down. This is especially true for the multitude of women in the informal sector working as household helps, construction site workers, agricultural farmers, street vendors, rag pickers etc. While the civil society has tried to reach out to women in economic distress, yet the extent of loss has been such that it will require prolonged sustained collective efforts for several years to reach the level attained by early 2020. The vulnerability of some women has not just been increased on account of their gender but also by natural calamities like cyclones and floods which ravage their scant but existing means of livelihood. As livestock and looms have been lost, the fear of the deadly virus seems like a remote concern. Apart from natural calamities, development induced displacement and relocation to relief camps show the implausibility of physical distancing to combat infection.

The health scare has also thrown challenges to the traditional system of education. While 'online' education was offered an alternative to regular mode of teaching, no specific attention has been paid to the ways in which this would disadvantage the girl child, especially those from marginalised communities. Needless to say, with the shift to online education, the pressure is again on young mothers and those from the marginalised communities especially, to first of all equip themselves with the technical know-how and then facilitate their children, apart from handling housework and other 'care' responsibilities. Questions of access, availability and affordability of technology stand to mediate the gains/losses that online education can offer. It is noteworthy that due to the economic stress of the lockdown, hundreds of thousands of workers had to resort to 'reverse migration'. This phenomenon, which is not short of a humanitarian crisis, begs the question of belongingness of such citizens within the polity. The unwillingness of the 'metropolis' to 'accommodate' the 'migrant' workers, throws into question the model of development that has so far been taken for granted by most of the people. Yet while such serious concerns plague the country, the media continues to promote a cult of domesticity which advertises the 'naturalness' of women's care work. While news channels have focussed on how women premiers have

successfully combated the threat of Covid-19 in different countries of the world, they have hardly focussed on the plight of the 'ordinary' women of India, let alone women of North-East India.

In the light of the above, the proposed e-conference attempts to foreground the voices and experiences of women from North East India on the myriad issues that have affected them during the times of Covid-19. We hope that the e-conference will be able to fill up a visible gap that exists within the academic scenario wherein though women's voices can no longer be silenced yet the North-East remains at the margins. The e-conference aims to bring together young scholars, researchers, faculty members who can bring in primary data, narratives and insights from different parts of North East which will help in understanding the diverse range of issues that can come under the purview of gender and pandemics, specifically Covid-19. In a nutshell, this e-conference intends to be a platform for all those who are hidden even while discussions on Covid-19 are taking place.

The present e-conference is held under the auspices of Indian Association For Women's Studies which spear-headed the emergence and growth of Women's Studies as an interdisciplinary academic movement in India. The IAWS has held several activities to reach out to the Women's Studies Centres and women's rights organisations of North-East India, the most visible among which was the XIVth National Conference of Women's Studies on the theme 'Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from the Women's Movement' that was held from 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014 and hosted by Gauhati University. It was a collaborative venture with Gauhati University, Cotton College State University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Guwahati) and North-East Network. Prior to that in December 2013, IAWS in collaboration with ICHR had held a regional workshop on 'Customary Law, Law and Women in North-East India'. Subsequent to the Guwahati conference another seminar on 'Gender and Displacement' was held in GU on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2015 as a part of its initiative to consistently engage with pertinent issues of North-East India. The present venture is an attempt to take forward the previous initiatives and also to expand the ambit of partnerships that IAWS has forged in the past.

### **3 days Regional E-Conference: Sub-Themes Titles (Details are in the pages that follow)**

1. Women's Protection and Safety
2. Women, Work and Livelihood
3. Women and Health
4. Concerns of Marginalized Groups

5. Gender and Education
6. Citizenship and Migration
7. Women and Media
8. Climate Change and Development

### **IMPORTANT DATES AND INSTRUCTIONS:**

- **Submission of Abstracts: 10.08.2020**
  - **Information on Selection of Abstract: 13.08.2020**
  - **Submission of Full Papers: 21.08.2020**
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- Abstract submission must be sent on the email assigned for the selected sub-theme by the paper presenter.
  - Though candidates may send multiple abstracts, but only one paper will be allowed for presentation. Therefore, please be judicious and select your sub-theme carefully.
  - Those who fail to send their full papers, will not be allowed to present their paper.
  - Once the abstract is selected, guidelines for submission of full papers will be informed.

**There is no registration fee for the E-conference.** But Indian Association for Women's Studies encourages that those who are not members of the association, take membership.

**For membership, please visit:** <http://www.iaws.org>

### **Guidelines for Abstract Submission**

Please ensure the following before abstract submission-

- The word limit for abstract should be about 500 words.
- Sub-theme name
- Title for the Abstract
- Author/s Name/s
- Institutional Affiliation
- Email Id
- Telephone number
- Full address for Correspondence

## SUB THEME 1: WOMEN'S PROTECTION AND SAFETY

**Coordinators:** *ANURITA P. HAZARIKA* (State Director, North-East Network, Assam) & *NASMEEM F. AKHTAR* (Chairperson, Centre for Women's Studies, Dibrugarh University)

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The COVID-19 pandemic is indeed a destabilising time, deepening social inequalities and increasing violence against women (VAW). This is also a moment of significant unpredictability and many are experiencing fear, anxiety, and anger as a normal response to this crisis. The pandemic has disproportionately affected woman because of their gender status. The associated frustrations are unleashed on women with loss of incomes, livelihoods, and dwindling basic needs in private and public spaces. They continue to remain marginalized in this extra ordinary situation. The United Nations Secretary General on 5th April 2020, warned thus “we have seen a horrifying global surge in domestic violence”

The unequal gender relations in patriarchal systems are leaving them with few coping mechanisms Assam is infamous when it comes to crimes against women. National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB) 2017 data for Assam states that ‘cruelty by husband’ rate as reported to police stands at 60 per lakh (a hundred thousand) populations. Women’s mobility will continue to remain restricted as the lockdown is lifted in phases across the country. Issues of safety will remain a central concern as patriarchal norms will continue to control women’s mobility and continuing risk of violence in public spaces.

In case of the north eastern part of India, while the number of COVID-19 cases was significantly lower till the third phase of the countrywide lockdown, the numbers suddenly shot up with the people returning home from the other states of the country. The region is at present grappling with a series of other issues alongside the pandemic: floods, fire in an oil well, meagre supply of essentials as a result of bottlenecks in transportation as a result of floods and lockdown in the urban areas, apart from problems related to job losses, pay cuts and the like.

In the case of women from this region, their situation is all the more alarming, because, while struggling to survive amid natural and man-made disasters and the allied problems, as governments

implement lockdown policies, they are being trapped with abusive partners, isolated from their support networks and may be unable to access essential services. Matrilineal societies are also not free from abuse and discrimination on women.

This panel aims at deliberating upon the various issues and challenges facing the lived experiences of women and their coping strategies, policy intervention and academic insights to ensure women's protection and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, in various spheres, be it the home or the workplace or the public space , with special focus on women in the North Eastern India.

- ❖ Though not exhaustive, suggestive topics for submission of abstracts under this sub theme are:
- ❖ Violence against Women at Home
- ❖ Women's safety issues in work place
- ❖ Violence against women in public spaces
- ❖ State Responses to Violence against Women during the COVID -19 pandemic
- ❖ Role of the Media as a Catalyst to Address VAW
- ❖ NGOs as Agents Against VAW during COVID-19
- ❖ Issues and Challenges of the of the Frontline Women Workers working in the NE region and those from the NE Region Working in other States/Regions/Countries
- ❖ Protection and Security/Safety Issues Related to Women Migrating to and from the NE Region during the Pandemic
- ❖ Protection and Safety of the Rights of Marginalised Women: Minorities, Elderly Women, Ethnic groups and Tribes, Economically Backward & differently abled Women, different gender and sexual identities
- ❖ Women's Access to justice and procurement of rights

## SUB THEME 2: WOMEN, WORK AND LIVELIHOOD

**Coordinators:** *MOUSUMI MAHANTA* (Assistant Professor, Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women's Studies, Tezpur University) &

*MADHURIMA GOSWAMI* (Head and Associate Professor, Chandraprabha Saikini Centre for Women's Studies, Tezpur University)

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At the present time, the economy of the world is heading towards a recession due to lockdown and all the cities, towns, transport, factories are motionless, and people have to remain within the four walls for months due to pandemic Covid-19. This has been a tough time for all the health organizations and governments of all the countries across the world. The World Health Organization suggested lockdown as best precautionary measures against the new infection cases of corona virus. Even the first world countries with best health facilities have failed to overcome this pandemic. Global economy has shrivelled very fast which will show its impact on the coming years. India is also affected severely by this virus infection and gradually as the cases have increased, the period of lockdown has been also extended. Covid -19 has emerged as a multifaceted crisis in India leading to displacement, institutional betrayals and State Violence. Even in North East India, the situation is not much different from other parts of India.

Economic inequality among men and women in terms of employment opportunities and outcomes, earning and returns to labour are persistence concerns in our country, both in formal and informal sectors. Women were already agonized with the disparity in equal access to resources and equal pay for equal job. Woman's housework has always devalued and considered as unproductive. Under 'patriarchal bargain' women work always has been stressed, their work has remained subsidiary in households or in wider political and legal context.

Women working in both organised and unorganised sectors are in disarray and it is evident that there will be in terrible crises of sustainable livelihood after the Covid crises. While on one hand, many women are losing their jobs in private companies on the other hand, women working as domestic helper, daily waged labours (working in tea shops, construction sites etc) are not allowed to continue their work. In North East India most of the women work as street vendors, small scale entrepreneurs, beauticians etc. This period of lockdown has become a major hindrance in their



work in general and their livelihood in particular. Women essential workers (ASHA workers, anganwadi workers, cleaners) are burdened with care work that Covid crisis has aggravated. Despite their contribution, the work of ASHA workers and Anganwadi workers is considered as part time and voluntary. In the backdrop of the above, government schemes geared towards provision of economic consistency during this period should be scrutinised for its gender sensitivity, accessibility and sustainability.

While this sub-theme is expansive, it hopes to focus specifically on the following areas:

- ❖ Women, work and leisure during Covid -19 pandemic
- ❖ Women in Organised sectors and their livelihood during Covid -19 pandemic
- ❖ Women in unorganised sectors and their livelihood during Covid -19 pandemic
- ❖ Domestic workers, women in agriculture and their livelihood during Covid -19 pandemic
- ❖ Women small scale entrepreneurs, street vendors and their livelihood
- ❖ Women, work, governmental accommodations and sustainable livelihood after Covid -19 Pandemic.

### SUB-THEME 3: WOMEN AND HEALTH

**Coordinator:** *DEBAJANEE BORA* (Research Assistant, Centre for Women's Studies,  
*Dibrugarh University*)

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In the recent decades, though it has been recognized that women's health is not only related to reproductive, maternal and biological health, yet the need for further research on various determinants of women's health cannot be undermined. The fact that women's health is associated generally with reproductive and maternal health indicates the gendered nature of the society and the State. In many instances, the health policies in India have reinforced gendered norms in women's lives and women's health. Women are considered as a category based on their social roles of 'mother' within the social institution of 'marriage' in health policies. Moreover, the health policies mostly reflect the philosophy of the State's concerns on women's health primarily in terms of 'safe motherhood' and 'safe delivery'. Women's health concerns can be visible in policy discourse mostly in regard to the maternal health which is considered important for the development of national health- both demographically and financially. Apart from maternal and reproductive health a 'culture of silence' can be seen in the context of women's health and health care services. Research in the area of women's health has established that in majority of cases, women's health concerns are second to other members of the family. Many narratives in this area indicate women's ignorance and their secondary treatment of their own health, the adaptability to live their lives with many health conditions, and their health adjustments.

It has been witnessed that the current Covid-19 pandemic has posed new challenges to women's health- be it within the realm of reproductive, maternal, or mental health. The rapid spread of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown are resulting immense challenges in regard to antenatal and post-natal care, accessibility to health care services and other necessary food supplies. Furthermore, a majority of marginal health care workers who are fighting the pandemic at the frontline are women. This is another important area related to the gendered nature of health care systems where women are recruited in low paid jobs such as Nurses, ASHA workers etc. While their salaries continue to remain low, their health conditions are hardly discussed in the public arena despite their susceptibility being high. Besides their high risk exposure to the virus,

reports have also revealed that these women are also going through immense social trauma in their families and neighborhood since they are being treated as a suspicious carrier of the virus.

Women's mental health has also suffered during this period due to the increase in number of cases related to domestic violence and sexual harassment. Additionally, women are also under a growing pressure of balancing the household as well as the professional commitments. With the under availability of coping up mechanisms, the pandemic is significantly altering the lives of women in all parts of the country including the North-East of India. Moreover, the health concerns of the marginalized section of the society such as tea garden women workers, women from diverse ethnic and minority groups which went mostly unheard even in 'normal times', are likely to see an aggravated neglect during the Covid-19 pandemic

In this context, this sub-theme proposes that these aspects of women's health be probed and analyzed by paper presenters. With a special reference to North-East India, this sub theme would encourage paper presenters to use data sources of Covid-19 pandemic period to address the following issues:

- ❖ Mental health
- ❖ Reproductive Health
- ❖ Adolescent Health
- ❖ 'Culture of Silence' and various factors determining women's health
- ❖ Women of marginalised group and their health concerns
- ❖ Women's access to health care services
- ❖ Health conditions of women health care providers

## SUB-THEME 4: CONCERNS OF MARGINALISED GROUPS

**Coordinator:** *RAKHEE KALITA MORAL* (Head, Centre for Women's Studies, Cotton University)

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This panel would concern itself with persisting marginalities of gender in northeast India interrogating the very notion of the 'marginal' with respect to economic, social, emotional and cultural forms of gendered exclusions in the time of the pandemic. It will invite papers that unpack the complex gamut of women's experiences and realities in the wake of new sites of marginality created by the re-mobilities and adjustments that are currently being witnessed in the onslaught of Covid-19. Given that these gendered experiences are sharpest at the intersections of class, caste, indigeneity, tribes, alternative sexualities, professions, urban/rural dichotomies the panel will also examine how the notion of the outsider and migrants/refugees/non-citizens in segregated spaces ( 'quarantine' and in covid facilities) are reinforced as exclusionary categories. How do women perceive themselves as autonomous selves or representatives of bona-fide groups given their attempts to occupy ontological and physical spaces within these marginalities and in altered configurations and relationships within the home? The panel hopes to also debate around questions of existing injustices towards such communities of women within the political, cultural and intellectual matrices of northeast India, and probes gaps in women's liberties in a space that has long witnessed customary law, oral traditions and gendered practices. In India's northeast , the question of labour is not only tied often critically to migrant female workers within the region, but often inseparable from women of indigenous groups who find themselves bereft of daily livelihoods. Compounding the woes of such marginal sections is the threat of unsafe homes and unprotected spaces which they inhabit in the cities during this pandemic.

The panel will be guided by concerns such as: Do women's gendered bodies contest these marginalities in their everyday lives, and how do silences get counterpointed by expressions in this time of strange inter-personal communication? Do women find the space for a collective voice in the present crisis? Further, how is the resistance to such exclusions articulated through activism, literary traditions, the media for example, and is there space for its negotiation only within the

academy? And, will these impact policy and social transformation at this critical moment in our present history when “lockdowns”, “social distancing” and “isolation” breed their own violent repercussions for vulnerable groups of women?

## SUB THEME 5: GENDER AND EDUCATION

**Coordinators:** *POONAM KAKOTI BORAH* (Assistant Professor, Department of Women's Studies, Gauhati University) &

*GITA RANI BHATTACHARYA* (State Programme Director, Assam Mahila Samata Society)

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Education in India has been persistently marked by a gender gap. Though the literacy levels have increased from 18.52% in 1951 to 74.04% in 2011, yet a visible gender gap continues to challenge educationists and policy makers. With the passage of Right to Education in 2009 steady progress has marked the educational scenario in India. In this regard, the role of various international instruments for universalising education cannot be undermined. District Information System for Education (DISE) reports have shown that though enrolment levels have increased, gender gap continues to persist because of the high drop-out rates of girls, especially after they attain puberty. Child marriage and child labour continue to plague the educational realm. Regional disparity in education is visible from the fact that though states such as Mizoram, have shown encouraging statistics as far as female literacy rate is concerned (89% according to 2011 census), other states from the NE such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur continue to lag behind, with statistical rates of only 57.7%, 66.3% and 72.4% respectively.

The scenario for Higher Education also does not seem to be particularly encouraging as gender inequalities continues to persist. Though the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report of 2019 notes that the number of women in higher education is increasing at a fast pace of 18.2 million females vis-a-vis 19.2 million males, the phenomenon of clustering is extremely worrisome. The UGC report of 2015-16 has shown that while in Arts 41.1% of the total enrolment are women; in Engineering women constitute only 10.10%.

Gendered exclusion and marginalisation in education is not just experienced by young female students but also by female teachers at different levels of education. This is visible through a peculiar pyramidal structure which represents the decreasing number of female teacher as one moves up the educational levels. A study by CEIC in 2013 showed that though there are only 88 female teachers per 100 male teachers in India level. A regional disaggregated data reveals that in

states like Arunachal, Nagaland, and Tripura it fell down to 56, 59 and 33 respectively. The AISHE report of 2019 also tells a similar story that while there are 74 female per 100 male assistant professors, the corresponding figure for professors is 37 female per 100 male.

As the situation around Covid-19 worsens in India, the educational scenario has been hard-hit. It can be expected that drop-out rates would increase and this is undeniably going to have a gendered angle. The fear of corona virus and uncertain future forced thousands towards reverse migration and with the diminishing means of livelihood, education of the daughters of these migrant workers faces a doubtful future. It has been estimated that globally **1.53 billion learners are already out of school**. The current health scenario has also seen a rise in the cases of child marriage which parents deciding to wed-off their daughters instead of waiting for schools to re-open and education resuming. The disruption of schools has also taken a toll on the mental health of young learners, for which no immediate relief seems available. As hostels and residential arrangements have been shut down, children coming from marginalised sections of the population violence prone households as well as children with special needs are forced to go back to such locations where opportunities for learning is minimal. This poses a threat to all the hard-earned gains that were made in previous years.

In order to keep the educational system functional, online education was proposed as a viable alternative, without much consideration being given to the unequal access to digital technology among learners. Though techARCH study shows that 502.2 million Indians owned smart phones by December 2019, there is a visible digital divide based on class, geographical location and gender. Alongside the questions of access and availability of smart phones, questions of affordability of internet data and the penetration of 3G data also arise. In brief, online education in a country marked by visible social cleavages can compound the existing inequalities. The only route through which online education can succeed in taking forward the gains made in the past is only when government policies and programmes take into consideration the factors that affect learners at different levels of education: primary, secondary and higher education.

In the light of these challenges, this sub-theme proposes that papers based on relevant primary and secondary sources may help in contextualising the 'heterogeneous gendered realities' that have emerged in North East India, especially during the times of Covid-19. While this sub-theme is expansive, it hopes to focus specifically on the following areas:

- ❖ Digital technology and access to education at primary and secondary levels

- ❖ Digital technology and Higher Education Institutions
- ❖ Inequities in education created due to Rural-Urban Divide and Class position
- ❖ Economic fallout of lockdown on girls' education
- ❖ Covid-19 and education of children with special needs
- ❖ Teachers, Teaching and Covid-19
- ❖ Feminisation of Teaching?
- ❖ Reverse migration and the challenges to education of the children of the migrant population
- ❖ Language of instruction and use of internet
- ❖ Innovative programmes by civil society organisations to reach out to learners during Covid-19
- ❖ Assessment of initiatives by different state governments for reaching out to learners.



## SUB THEME 6: CITIZENSHIP AND MIGRATION

**Coordinator: V. SAWMVELI** (*Assistant Professor, Centre for Sociology and Social Anthropology, TISS Guwahati*)

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People seek belongingness through citizenship. Their 'statehood' and 'statelessness' depends solely on whether the state would acknowledge their citizenry, the conditions under which their citizenship would be accepted. The creation by the state of certain categories though guided not by administrative and governing concerns, also acts to provide or deprive differential citizenship such as in the case of Scheduled Categories.. This is evident also from the production of a 'third' category in gender preferences and the bio-cultural approach to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 to the arbitrary citizenship of Chakma people in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Tripura. While for trans and non-binary people, belongingness comes as in an experience with the state which acknowledges gender as destructive for Chakma people, belongingness comes as an experience with the river and land. The idea behind citizenship remains however, to make bodies governable, to invite bodies to be governed, under the pretext of electricity, scholarships, food security, and so on. Citizenship, however, posits the full citizen as a privileged cis-man, who does not desire to belong, but who defines citizenship only through his experience. Since borders and territories are gendered, so is citizenship is gendered: with its attempt to harden the borders, to gate keep, to allow, deny and penetrate entry. The differential treatment by the state is structured and systemic, and this systemic differentiation remains the fundamentals to gendered citizenship. In the case of Northeast India, the Brahminical colonial control has produced racialised othered bodies of people from the eight states who are coerced and invited for conditional citizenship in India. In a time of increasing migration, citizenship has come to occupy an important space since the dominant notion is that 'rights' and 'entitlements' are connected to citizenship and nationality.

Migration, be it temporal, is often dependent on the spatial nature of belonging. Migration demands movement and these movements demands change in citizenship. The objective of this sub-theme is to explore the connection between citizenship and migration as inherently gendered which has become further amplified during the current pandemic as gendered inequalities have

become explicit. Migrants workers from different parts of the country starved and walked miles in the absence of housing and accommodation. The point to be noted is that even in the pandemic the narrative of migrant women, trans and queer, especially from Northeast India, were silenced. Many young women from North-East who were employed in the service industry, as beauticians, salespersons, hospitality and especially healthcare workers faced uncertain situations. In addition to the challenge that they faced as a woman, Covid-19 also accentuated the racial discrimination and assaulted that they had to bear because of their “features” and “looks”. Sadly, Covid-19 seen from such a perspective is not just gendered but also racialised as racial and gendered prejudice have become part of our everyday lives.

During the time of Covid-19, one can argue that India’s approach to fight against the virus has not just been non-inclusive, it also lacks a gender lens. Many women are on the frontline and yet their narratives are largely neglected. In addition to this, there has not been much focus on the experiences of internal migrants, wherein nurses from Manipur faced racial discrimination in Assam and Bengal, thus highlighting the heterogeneity of Northeast India, and access to citizenship rights. Therefore, it is important to examine the existing realities from gender and intersectional perspective to understand differences and inequalities in acquiring movements, displacements and migration which in turn affects their citizenship.

## SUB THEME 7: WOMEN AND MEDIA

**Coordinators:** *SUKMAYA LAMA* (Assistant Professor (History) KKHSOU) &

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The pervasive presence of gender in culture and popular imagination has been due to the prominence and the role of media. This is an undeniable fact. Maitrayee Chaudhuri mentions it as “hypervisibility” in her work, “Refashioning India: Gender, Media and a Transformed Public Discourse”. The relevance of media in the lives of women specially during the times of the pandemic thus needs to be addressed. The attempt would be to understand as to what extent has the media been able to provide space for women to negotiate and share their experience or for that matter acknowledge their response to the pandemic in a positive direction.

The gendered impact of the pandemic has not been adequately covered by the media. Not much has been written about or discussed in the media regarding the challenges faced by women in accessing emergency health services, the gender divide when it comes to access to technology and infrastructure, decision making in matters of finance and education. The COVID pandemic has exposed the inherent prejudice that runs through the society manifested in the recent surge of news coming from different corners of the country of youths from North East and mostly women who have been targets of racial slurs like “Corona”, “Chinese” and faced discrimination. New media (social media) however has also proved to be a site of resilience during this period of crisis wherein women have used the digital space to help other women to overcome the effect of the pandemic. Similarly, the response of the female entrepreneurs to support women workers in this time of crisis has also been left out from the media narratives. The collective voices of women facing problems at home and public spaces have also been denied a platform in the mainstream media.

The sub-theme aims to explore the media narratives during the pandemic and examine the silent voices the voices coming from the marginalized sections with a cultural and critical approach.

## SUB-THEME 8: CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

**Coordinators:** VIJAYALAKSHMI BRARA (*Associate Professor, Centre for Manipur Studies, Manipur University*)

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Climate change and its consequent impact is not gender neutral. Although it affects everyone, the intensity differs according to the vulnerability and coping abilities. Climate change impacts both men and women, but differently. It is usually perceived that the impacts of climate change are mostly physical and economic and are equal, but, there are social and cultural impacts which are distributed unequally.

The differential gender impact due to climate change as well development induced development has emboldened because of the Covid pandemic. In the areas which were fairly disconnected it did not impact much. This happened largely due to their herbal rich diets and high health standards. But with the rise in infrastructures and human interventions creating imbalances in the environment, these communities, and especially women and children have become vulnerable to the disease.

The north-eastern region of India, which comes under the Himalayan Range and consists of eight small states, is already recording higher temperatures and perceptible changes in monsoon precipitation. North-east India is characterized by considerable biodiversity, ethnic diversity, and traditional knowledge systems as well as customary laws. Traditional knowledge which is majorly a repository of women is losing its base because of disappearance of bio-diversity due to arbitrary infrastructures, deforestation, and agricultural practices that deplete resources. Loss in the variety of herbs has made the communities vulnerable to the pandemic as their immunity levels have gone down. Given the codified sexual division of labour, the burden on women to be primary care givers of their families, development induced climate change is impacting the women of this region. Therefore we need to document and scale these gendered impacts due to climate change and development at the times of Covid-19.

The focus areas of the papers under this sub theme can be around the gender dimension of climate change in the times of Covid-19. Taking this broad theme in mind, the sub topics of this sub theme can be as follows:

- ❖ Climate change and food security and impact on livelihood
- ❖ Bio-diversity-infrastructure and its impact on women's traditional knowledge base
- ❖ Water- impacts due to scarcity and over-flooding.
- ❖ Development induced climate change and its impact on household drudgery.

We also welcome specific Case Studies of different regions bringing out issues of Climate Change, Development and Gender and the way the women are fighting against the present situation.

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