

# UNEQUAL CITIZENS



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WOMEN'S NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE,  
MILITARISATION, CORRUPTION AND SECURITY

*Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Tripura*



WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK  
AFGHANISTAN • PAKISTAN • INDIA



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## PROCESS OF DOCUMENTING COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The India Community Conversations (CC) brief focused on ‘conflict-affected areas’. The notion of a conflict situation was interpreted as broader than a ‘militarised zone’. The result is a mix of conventional conflicts engaging with the border districts of Jammu & Kashmir and Tripura, peoples’ democratic resistance movements against land acquisition and dispossession in Jagatsinghpur, and communal violence and its aftermath in Kandhamal, Odisha.

Data collection was done through a combination of methods— one-to-one interviews, home visits, focus group discussions, town hall meetings and structured seminars. Site visits were also undertaken and interviews done with affected women, civil society members and grassroots political leaders. On average, each study drew on about 15-20 days of field research. The researchers were aware that reaching women without “going through the men” would be a challenge. The report flags the reality that research projects of this nature require sensitivity and pose risks to both researchers and their respondents, equally. Talking to women, in particular, poses an additional complexity in view of the patriarchal control within the family, community and struggles.

*“When I went to the police station to lodge a complaint, they asked me to take off my clothes and hand them over for forensic examination. I appealed to them to give me something else to wear. They indifferently said I would have to get another set of clothes myself. Some kind person, not from the police force, brought me some clothes to change into. The police tried to dissuade me from lodging a complaint. If this is the way our legal system works, why will any woman pursue justice when she has been sexually assaulted? After going to the police station, I was constantly on the move for several months, hiding in different places. I am still haunted by the incident. But I want my story to be told. It may give strength to other women who have had similar experiences.”—Woman villager, Kandhamal, Odisha*

## MULTIPLE REALITIES OF WOMEN

The CCs demonstrated the gendered experience of women in conflict and its aftermath, which is rooted in the low social position of women. However, the CCs showed women to be survivors and agents in each site. On the one hand the sense of being unequal citizens ran through all the conversations, on the other hand, it showed that in the aftermath of crisis, it is women who continue to rebuild homes and lives. The CCs show that women’s positions differed according to their location as members of a class, caste, ethnicity, religion or region. When women are able to work together, peaceful community co-existence is strengthened, but gender solidarity cannot always be assumed as a given.

In the lives of women, violence is a continuum, widespread, and all-pervasive, respecting no boundaries. The continuum includes the everyday experience of violence and situations of violent conflict. While domestic violence is a reality in women’s lives, faced with state and community violence women feel an internal pressure to conceal their experience of such violence. Sexual violence is integral to conflicts, with violence against women’s bodies used to humiliate, punish and destroy community “honour”. Rather than be positioned as a crime against women, sexual violence continues to be framed as necessary to uphold the “honour” of the family and/or the community. In the particular case of the anti-POSCO struggle in Odisha, the instrumentalisation of women’s bodies takes on another guise when the body itself becomes the strategy of resistance against the onslaught of the state forces (under pressure of male leadership).

The CCs revealed a noticeable gap in sustained investigation and documentation of violence against women, especially sexual violence. The socio-legal construct of rape in the law and order system and the evidentiary numerous difficulties inherent in a situation of mass-politised violence makes access to the normal structures of justice for the survivors very difficult and indeed a demoralising challenge.

*“Life is hell when you live so close to the border. The soldiers never leave us in peace. They use us as protective shields. They are the first to run for their lives in case of a landmine blast. They don’t care whether we survive or bleed to death, in fact death would be a better option for us than this daily drudgery.” Woman villager, border districts of Rajouri Poonch, Jammu & Kashmir*

## CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

A climate of impunity prevails in all the sites of inquiry. Impunity is entrenched and operates in multi-faceted ways making access to justice a challenge for women and men, both in declared and undeclared ‘disturbed areas’. For instance, undemocratic laws like the Armed Forces Special Power Act denies citizens fundamental freedoms and rights. The indifference and non-accountability of state agencies has meant that women and men live with the

knowledge that their perpetrators roam free. Conflict and militarisation destroy social cohesion, and with it, mutual trust; which reinforces the vulnerability of affected people, especially women. What compounds the situation is the absence of accountability and justice mechanisms. Women's insecurities increase manifold owing to the proliferation of multiple armed actors.

## MILITARISATION OF DEVELOPMENT

The intrusion of the security forces in civilian areas for 'development' activities undermines democratic civilian authority and makes people's, especially women's, access to basic needs more difficult. Moreover, the army's priorities are strategic, not developmental. The political economy of conflict and the militarisation of development assistance exacerbate the nexus between the military, business, bureaucracy and politicians.

*"The jawans (soldiers) pass lewd comments at girls as they walked to school, but I complained to their commanding officer."... "We were careful never to drink or eat more than what was absolutely necessary. So that we would not have to go outside at night. Come early evening, we would pull down the shutters and douse the lights. We did not want to draw any attention. We did not want the militants to come. The army would follow and beat us." —Woman villager, border districts Rajouri Poonch, Jammu & Kashmir*

## CORRUPTION

The CCs reflect a high degree of cynicism and demoralised resignation at the widespread and prevalent nature of corruption — which taints everything, hollowing out the education system, undermining land rights, access to jobs, welfare and development schemes and compensation entitlements. No sector is immune. In Jammu & Kashmir people referred to "efficient corruption" and "inefficient corruption".

*Without bribes POSCO could not have entered Odisha! The ruling party has eaten money from the company, we need little food. Since their stomachs are big, they need to eat a lot. This is the reason why the government, instead of protecting the interest of its own people, is protecting the company. For its own benefit the company has kept hired goons by paying them heftily. The police and the bureaucrats have benefited greatly from the Company. Local politicians are co-opted by the ruling party leaders." —Woman villager, Jagatsinghpur district, Odisha*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Prioritise** women's security and survival as the state is obligated under national and international legal frameworks to protect all its citizens.
- **Establish** zero-tolerance policy against sexual violence.
- **Develop** fast track mechanisms and a built-in civic accountability structure to ensure justice and compensation for affected peoples.
- **Empower** women to directly address issues of security and militarisation by promoting their meaningful participation in decision-making structures
- **Ensure** an end to impunity by all armed forces, state and non-state, and justice for women who have survived human rights violations, ensure gender sensitive police and paramilitary training and increase women's access to legal aid.
- **Repeal** the Armed Forces Special Powers Act as it greatly impacts security and rights, particularly those of women.
- **Honour** all international legal and normative commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

## RESISTANCE TO PREDATORY DEVELOPMENT: JAGATSINGHPUR, ODISHA

- **Ensure** that every effort is made and possible action is taken to revoke the ownership of land pattas (entitlement documents and ownership patterns) of those families who under duress signed off their land rights for a meagre compensatory amount.
- **Take immediate measures** to resume schools, hospitals, etc. in the affected villages and ensure all basic services are reinstated. The people are entitled to these services, as their fundamental right.
- **Guarantee** the people's fundamental right to freedom of movement and abjure coercive practices such as arbitrary detention.

## AFTERMATH OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE: KANDHAMAL, ODISHA

- **Apply** the provisions of NREGA and other livelihood schemes of the government to women of the affected community, with no discrimination on the basis of caste, religion or gender. Act against those engaging in such discrimination or corruption; identify and allot jobs under NREGA that are better-suited to women, particularly those who are pregnant, physically ill, weak or elderly.
- **Identify** unreported cases of sexual and gender-based violence, and ensure their cases are registered, investigated and prosecuted by the appropriate authorities.
- **Take pro-active measures** to prevent the threat of sexual and gender-based violence against those women and their daugh-

ters, who are involved in proceedings related to the communal violence, as well as to the women human rights defenders and social activists who assist them.

- **Create accountability** mechanisms for government officials who fail to discharge their duties with due diligence, including responding promptly to calls for protecting women and girls; registration of their complaints; investigation and prosecution thereof and in providing reparations in contexts of communal violence.
- **Incorporate** the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into the national policy framework of India, which addresses aspects including the rights and specific needs of female Internally Displaced Persons.

#### LOC: RAJOURI-POONCH (JAMMU & KASHMIR)

- **Demilitarise** civilian zones, including schools, health centres and other public utilities.
- **Strengthen** mechanisms for maintaining the ceasefire at the Line of Control.
- **Sign and ratify** the International Landmines Convention (1996) and urgently address the issue of de-mining and the gendered implications of compensation, medical and livelihood support.

#### FRACTURED SOCIETY: TRIPURA

- **Promote** education, empowerment and leadership of tribal women within their communities, political parties and the Autonomous Tribal Council.
- **Facilitate** women's unity through inter-ethnic and inter-community roundtables with civil society (independent of government intervention) to identify common issues.
- **Ensure** that the Women's Commission of India adequately addresses the grievances and needs of indigenous women.
- **Ensure** that government schemes meant for indigenous women reach their intended beneficiaries.

#### CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Across the region, the security agenda of states has undermined the rule of law and accountability. Escalating defence expenditures, declining social funding and predatory development models that exploit national resources and marginalise and displace communities have deepened structural inequalities. The growing democratic deficit and rampant corruption are reinforcing extremist, militant and fundamentalist ideologies. As such, the region has become a playground for private and state actors with global geo-strategic interests, and people, especially women, pay the price.

#### THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

How do you take discussions about security, conflict, militarisation and governance outside elite security policy circles? How do you bring more women's voices into this discussion? How do we integrate their experiences and concerns into the security discourse? Brainstorming around these questions generated the idea of Community Conversations.

The "Community Conversations" process initiated in 2011 was one of the first activities undertaken by the Women's Regional Network. It evolved organically in each of the three WRN countries, adapting to different ground realities. The resulting documents reflect this diversity clearly—the methods are different, the questions are different, the perspectives vary.

At the core, however, a few things remained the same in every country. We sought out women who live and work in remote and insecure areas to understand their experiences, fears and insecurities. Our objective was to document the impact of militarisation, extremism and corruption on their ability to access rights and justice. The CCs emphasise women as survivors and make visible their agency in everyday life and in resistance movements. The Conversations acknowledge women's contribution to the post-conflict processes of justice, peace and social reintegration.

This process has generated rich and detailed accounts from Afghanistan, India and Pakistan of the gendered social impact of politicised violence, militarisation and corruption in conflict-affected areas. It anchors WRN's work firmly in the real world of

women's experiences. While the findings of each Community Conversation process remain context-specific, by identifying the common threads and themes, WRN will create cross-border strategies and seek common solutions.

#### THE WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

Founded in 2011, the Women's Regional Network (WRN) is a network of individual women civil society leaders from Afghanistan, India and Pakistan working together to strengthen women's rights to ensure peace and security in the region. WRN is animated by a vision of women working collaboratively within and across borders, to listen to and learn from each other to construct a common agenda towards equitable and sustainable development with full participation of women in building a just peace. At its launch, members of the Network identified interlinked areas of concern—militarisation, extremism, corruption and lack of security—as a priority for all three countries. WRN networks in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan are autonomous but work in close coordination with each other. Network members in each country have invited others to join and establish working relationships with individuals and organisations working for women's rights in their respective countries.



WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK  
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