

CITIZENSHIP

Theme: Gendered Citizenship and Human Development: Issues and Challenges

In the new millennium, the questions of women's full citizenship looms large before the world community for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, despite the large-scale induction of women into local development and politics around the world, there is increasing concern that neoliberal economic policies may have led to accelerating the feminization of labour and to deteriorating working conditions. There is also the fear that many instruments of 'empowerment' and 'participation' of women – watchwords of Third-Wave democratization around the world may have trapped women in bureaucratic logic and public altruism. However, the academic literature on these is certainly not conclusive. There is evidence that suggests that aspects of neoliberal informalisation may have empowered women in unexpected ways, for example, through labour mobilization (Kabeer 2008, for example), but also the counter-argument that such apparent gains need to be placed and interpreted in the light of the effects and impacts of other aspects of neoliberal policy in national and sub-national contexts (Gideon 2006, for instance). Scholars around the world examining women's political participation have also not arrived at a consensus: some point to the manner in which key ideas such as 'empowerment' and 'agency' have been appropriated by international and national agencies to mean a strictly limited participation that does not expand women's life-choices or address their strategic interests (Batliwala 2007) while others, examining the manner in which efforts aimed at women's 'empowerment' and 'agency' unfold on the ground in particular contexts, have pointed out that there may be unanticipated consequences and that change may indeed be in the offing (Cornwall 2004). As Cornwall notes, this uncertainty raises a number of questions for research: "To what extent has the expansion of participation by invitation worked to undermine the place of traditional political institutions like voting and protest, and is this in the interest of marginalised groups or the more articulate and organized professional classes? If the door is always open, what happens to those who choose not to go in—do they get discredited as troublemakers? And what are the reciprocal effects of the enlargement of the public space and the increasing permeability of boundaries between state and non-state institutions?" (p.9)

A third aspect of interest in interrogating post-millennium developments in women's citizenship is the shifts in the human rights discourse internationally, and in feminist interventions at the

international and national contexts, post-Beijing, to secure women's rights as human rights especially in a context in which women form a substantial part of the migrant worker population around the world. This too calls for inquiries sensitive to context, and available literature shows mixed gains. Most important, perhaps, is the work that draws insights from all these different aspects. Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, for example, points to the need to examine the manner in which neoliberalism and neo-conservatism merge and separate in different contexts around the world (2007).

The above complexities reverberate in the literature on India and on Kerala as well. The focus of the session is to explore the ways in which they have played out internationally, and in the Indian context. The presentations will draw on the knowledge and experience of three speakers on specific topics that connect the three aspects mentioned above and generates insight through putting them in mutual light. These are:

(1) The workings of the recent laws in India that pertain to aspects of women's lives not covered by personal laws – such as the Domestic Violence Act and the law against Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment at Workplace. Such laws have tremendous potential not only for protecting women's rights in the domestic sphere and intimate relationships, but also for advancing the conditions for women's full participation in public life and work.

(2) Developmental citizenship for women is an ongoing concern all over India, with the expansion of the NRLM and NREGS, and Kerala, perhaps, stands out as a particularly important instance in which women's involvement in governmental efforts at microfinance and microenterprise have grown into producing a more expansive sense of citizenship that straddles the worlds of local governance and local politics. The second presentation will probe Kerala's experience in detail while reflecting on the current scene at the national and global levels.

(3) Questions of women's citizenship in highly gendered and unequal processes of migration and in transnational family life now loom large with a greater number of women from the disadvantaged countries moving elsewhere seeking work, but often retaining transnational family connections. The degree to which women enjoy citizenship in the home and host countries does

shape their migration choices, the extent to which they exercise agency in migration, and their ability to negotiate in transnational family life effectively. Here again, Kerala forms an important case which may also serve as a spring-board for reflections on the national and international contexts.

References:

Batliwala , Srilatha (2007)) ‘Taking the Power Out of Empowerment – An Experiential Account’, *Development in Practice* 17.4 and 5.

Cornwall, Andrea (2004) ‘Introduction: New Democratic Spaces: Politics and Dynamics of Institutionalized Participation’, *IDS Bulletin* 35.2.

Gideon, Jasmine (2006) ‘Accessing Economic and Social Rights Under Neoliberalism: gender and rights in Chile’, *Third World Quarterly* 27, 7.

Kabeer, N. (2008) ‘Researching the Relationship Between Paid Work and Women’s Empowerment: Complexities, Contradictions and Contestations’, *Pathways of Women’s Empowerment Working Paper*, www.pathways-of-empowerment.org/research_empowering_pubs.html

Mukhopadhyay, M (2007) Introduction in M Mukhopadhyay and N Singh (eds) , *Gender Justice, Citizenship and Development*, New Delhi: IDRC/Zubaan.